338 MEN-AT-ARMS 338

THE KING'S GERMAN LEGION (1) 1803–1812

MIKE CHAPPELL

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SERIES EDITOR: LEE JOHNSON

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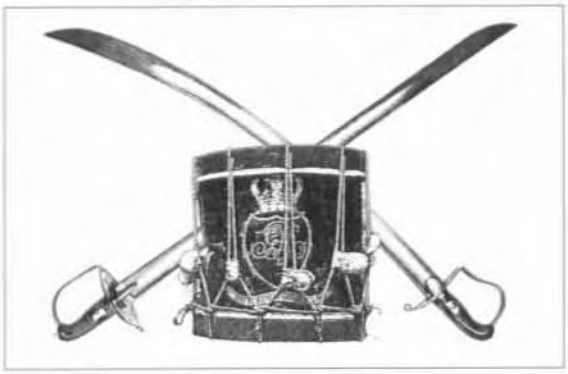

TEXT AND COLOUR PLATES BY
MIKE CHAPPELL

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THE KING'S GERMAN LEGION (1) 1803–1812

THE RAISING OF THE LEGION

IN THE YEAR 1803 the fourteen-month European interlude that was the Peace of Amiens came to an end, and Britain once again went to war against France. Napoleon Bonaparte, struggling to revive France's economy and assemble a fleet, was surprised by the British declaration of war. He had the most powerful army in the world but a second-rate navy. Britain had a powerful navy but a weak army. Seeking to strike at the British, but thwarted by the barrier of the English Channel, he sent an army corps to occupy the King of England's Hanoverian electorate – the homeland from which Britain's Hanoverian dynasty had been invited to the throne in 1714, and over which they still reigned – situated in that part of Germany that is today Lower Saxony and parts of North-Rhine Westphalia.

George William Frederick, King George III of Great Britain and Ireland, Elector of Hanover. When agreeing to the title 'King's German Regiment' being bestowed on units formed from his Hanoverian subjects he would have been mindful of the fact that a 'Queen's German Regiment' was already in British service, this title having been granted to the former Minorca Regiment for their gallantry in the Egyptian campaign of 1801. The regiments of the KGL became great favourites of George III, who loved to move among them talking in German and enjoying their music. (Author's drawing after Beechey)

One of the consequences of this particular piece of Napoleonic aggression was a steady but growing movement of men of the former Hanoverian Army to England, where they rallied as the King's German Legion. Napoleon's ruthless expansion and enforced revisions of the political map of Europe created many tens of thousands of refugees, many of whom ended up in the motley ranks of various, often short-lived corps in British pay. The KGL was something different: a large force of all arms, which would come to represent a significant minority of Britain's troops in the field, whose professional quality would keep it in the forefront of the British effort to bring down the French dictator and to free the Hanoverians' country from occupation by his troops. This is the first part of their story.

* * *

The KGL campaigned in several western European countries at a time when the political map of Europe was constantly being re-drawn. From the Baltic in the north to the island of Malta in the south, from Ireland and Portugal in the west to Pomerania in the east, the KGL marched and frequently fought in a continent very different to that of today.

In the early 19th century by far the most powerful western European nation was France. In a continent that was a kaleidoscope of small states, France stood secure behind much the same frontiers as today. A country of 27 millions with a common language, and with a number of strategic overseas possessions, she was by then in the thrall of Napoleon Bonaparte, a brilliant, charismatic dictator determined to impose his will on the nations surrounding France; among these he regarded Britain as the most powerful and most constant of his enemies. Created 'Consul for life' in 1802, Bonaparte was soon to crown himself 'Emperor of the French'.

Beyond France's eastern and south-eastern frontiers lay the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the Hapsburgs, a vast tract of eastern European territory but also including parts of Italy, minor German states and the Austrian Netherlands. The Hapsburg sovereign held the ancient title of Holy Roman Emperor, making him nominal ruler of a domain of scores of German states to the north of Austria, ranging in size from powerful nations to petty city-states. Amongst these was Hanover – whose Imperial Elector, effectively King, was George III, the third Hanoverian King of England. The most powerful among the German sovereigns was the Elector of Brandenburg – the King of Prussia, a country with a large and menacing army and an impressive military past, but little wealth.

Further east lay Poland and Russia. In the previous century Russia had developed from a small Grand Duchy into a great empire with a population estimated at 40 millions. To the north lay Sweden and Denmark. The Danes then held Schleswig and Holstein, the island of Heligoland and Norway; the Swedes, Finland and Swedish Pomerania. To the north-east lay Holland, or the United Provinces – a prosperous colonial power, drawing great wealth from her overseas empire and her central position as a trading nation. Britain was anxious to ensure the independence of Holland, particularly as the approaches to the great port of Antwerp passed through Dutch territory.

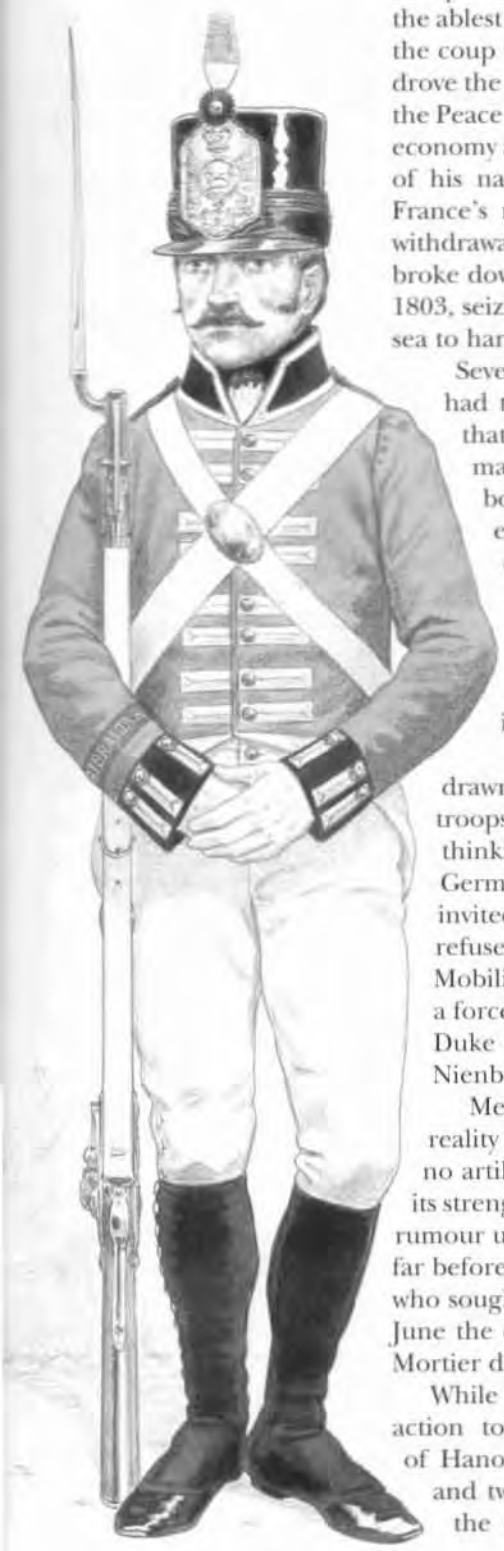
Beyond France's south-western border lay the Iberian peninsula, where Britain had further interests. Ensuring that the harbours of Spain and Portugal remained in friendly hands and garrisoning the fortress of Gibraltar were the most obvious of these. The vastness of Spain's overseas possessions made her the greatest colonial power of the time. Portugal also had colonies in South America and elsewhere.

To the south-east the Italian peninsula was parcelled out into a number of small states, to the north of which lay neutral Switzerland. These included the Kingdom of Sardinia; the Austrian duchies; the 'republic' of Genoa; the Papal states; the Republic of Venice; and the Kingdom of Naples (which included the island of Sicily). Much of south-eastern Europe and most of the eastern and southern seaboards of the Mediterranean were part of the Ottoman Empire, a power often at war with neighbouring Russia and Austria.

Britain had fought Revolutionary France from 1792 until the Peace of Amiens in 1802. A small country with a comparatively small population, Britain was looked down upon by the great European powers; but she enjoyed great advantages including her island position, guarded by the most powerful navy in the world. Her merchant fleets carried out trade with the Americas, the Indies and Europe, whilst at home her mines, mills, foundries and financial institutions combined to provide Britain with wealth beyond that of any nation in the world. Throughout the Napoleonic Wars Britain would be tireless in diplomacy, and lavish in financial subsidy, in order to build and sustain Continental alliances against Bonapartist France.

OPPOSITE **Private, 3rd Infantry Regiment, Hanoverian Army, 1803. The uniform is very similar to that of the British infantry of the time; the red coat is faced with black and has plain white lace, and the shako tuft is yellow-over-white. The colour of the turban wrapped round the base of the shako is unclear, but was probably black or dark blue. A striking detail is the *'GIBRALTAR'* cuff-title on his right forearm, marking his regiment's service in the defence of that besieged British fortress. (Author's drawing)**

Shako plate and cuff-title of the Hanoverian 3rd Infantry Regiment, 1803. Note the similarity of the plate to the British 'universal' pattern, the White Horse of Hanover predominating. The cuff-title was blue with white lettering. (Author's drawing)



The French occupation of Hanover

By early 1803 the world was aware of the ambitions of Napoleon Bonaparte. The former artillery officer had risen rapidly in the conspiratorial world of the Revolutionary regime, proving himself to be the ablest of France's generals with his victories in Italy and Egypt, before the coup which won him appointment as First Consul in 1800. He then drove the Austrians from Italy after his victory at Marengo before signing the Peace of Amiens. Set on further conquest, he was rebuilding France's economy after ten years of war, whilst attempting to increase the strength of his navy. Diplomatic negotiations, centred on the recognition of France's recent conquests, the offer of the island of Malta and the withdrawal of French forces from Switzerland and Holland, eventually broke down; and Britain declared war on France once again on 17 May 1803, seizing all shipping in British ports and sending her squadrons to sea to harry French vessels.

Several weeks prior to the commencement of hostilities France had threatened Britain by telling the British ambassador in Paris that unless British re-armament ceased the First Consul would march 20,000 troops into Holland and station them on the border with Hanover. This served to lower Hanoverian morale even further in a country that had recently endured occupation by the Prussian Army and which knew that little help could be expected from Britain. This apparently hopeless situation led to the neglect of Hanover's defences as reliance was placed on claims of neutrality guaranteed them under the Treaty of Basle. To counter the threat of a French invasion Hanover had an army of barely 10,000 men.

In this tense atmosphere various contingency plans were drawn up, one of which included the embarkation of Hanoverian troops and their evacuation to England. In this particular lay the thinking that would eventually lead to the foundation of the King's German Legion; but plans were not enough. French aggression was invited by the obvious weakness of a Hanoverian government which refused to take any action that might provoke a French invasion. Mobilisation was allowed to take place only at the last minute, when a force of 2,700 cavalry and 6,300 infantry assembled in late May, the Duke of Cambridge assuming command of 4,000 of these men at Nienburg on 1 June.

Meanwhile, the French invading force was on the march. In reality it was a weak army corps of 13,000 men, badly equipped, with no artillery and only a few squadrons of poorly-mounted cavalry. But its strength had been magnified in Hanoverian minds by insecurity and rumour until it was believed to be a force of 30,000 men. It had not got far before it was met by a deputation from the Hanoverian government who sought terms from the French commander, General Mortier. On 2 June the deputies returned to Hanover with the astonishing news that Mortier demanded the surrender of the whole Hanoverian Army.

While this piece of arrogance was being digested, the first encounter action took place at a village called Borstel when two regiments of Hanoverian dragoons, supported by a company of light infantry and two guns, checked the French and threw them back. This was the only battle of the campaign, the Hanoverians subsequently

withdrawing over the River Weser. The Convention of Suhlingen, signed on 3 June, brought an end to hostilities by declaring:
'I. The electorate of Hanover ... shall be occupied by the French Army.
II. The Hanoverian troops shall retire behind the Elbe ...'

The convention went on to order the delivering up of Hanoverian artillery, ammunition and horses, and the sequestration of public chests; to demand that Hanover pay, clothe and feed the French occupying force, and that the country's revenues be placed at the disposal of the French government.

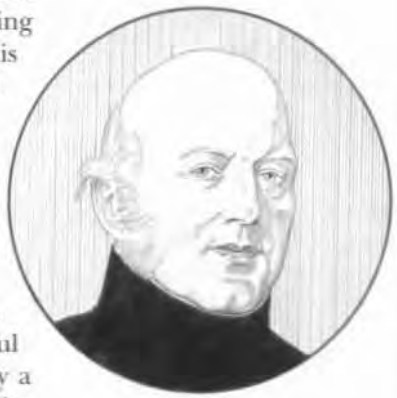
This exercise in armed robbery was being complied with when news was received that Bonaparte had refused to approve the convention and that hostilities were to recommence. In this atmosphere of coercion a second convention was drawn up ordering the Hanoverian troops to be taken to France as prisoners. Sooner than accept, a decision was taken by the Hanoverians to fight; but a revised convention, with more lenient terms, followed and was signed on 5 July aboard a boat moored in the middle of the Elbe. The effect of the final convention was to disband the Hanoverian Army. The men laid down their arms, handed over their

Western Europe at the close of the 18th century. The borders of the 'Holy Roman Empire' are indicated by the heavy broken line.

remaining horses, and marched home. (Some made their way to England immediately on ships sent to recover George III's possessions – particularly his stud horses.)

Raising the King's German Regiment

The Convention of the Elbe had stipulated that the men of the Hanoverian Army were on a parole which prohibited them from taking up arms against France. But King George III refused to ratify this convention; and the Duke of Cambridge – who had returned to England in disgust at the news of the deputation to Mortier – approached his brother the Duke of York, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, with a request for authority to raise a 4,000-strong regiment from the members of the disbanded Hanoverian Army. A warrant to this effect was issued on 18 July 1803 to Major Johann Friedrich von der Decken, adjutant to the Duke of Cambridge.



Adolphus Frederick, Duke of Cambridge, son of King George III. A lieutenant-general in the Hamnoverian Army of 1803, the duke became Colonel-in-Chief of the King's German Legion on 17 November of that year. He later became a field-marshal, and Viceroy of Hanover. (Author's drawing)

The warrant promised Von der Decken, then holding a commission in the British 60th Regiment, a colonelcy on the successful raising of a 450-man regiment of foreign infantry. On the same day a similar warrant was drafted to Major Colin Halkett, formerly of the Dutch service. Both officers began beating up for recruits without much success. (This, at a time when thousands of former Hanoverian soldiers had daily to endure the insults of the occupying French, including blandishments to enlist in their 'Légion Hanovrienne'.) Impetus to British recruiting was given by a proclamation of 10 August which stated:

'His Majesty King George III, King of the United Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland is pleased to bestow on Colonel v.d.Decken a Patent of authority empowering him to raise a Corps of Light Infantry to be named "The King's Germans", which, when recruited up to its full establishment is to be placed under the immediate command of HRH the Duke of Cambridge. All foreigners, but preferably all gallant Germans, are hereby invited to take service in this corps. ...'

This proclamation was distributed throughout Hanover and brought immediate results, as hundreds of officers and men of the former Hanoverian service sought passage to England. Enlisted by a network of recruiting agents which had by now been established, the men were given papers and directed to a port of embarkation – usually Husum on the North Sea coast of what was then Denmark. Here they were paid their enlistment bounties, given Danish passports, and put aboard ships for England. Officers were required to arrange and pay for their own passages.

On arrival in England the Hanoverians were directed to the depot of the King's Germans at Lymington in Hampshire, which eventually became so overcrowded that in September part of the depot moved to Parkhurst on the Isle of Wight. In October Von der Decken and Halkett agreed to combine their units in the interest of facilitating recruiting, and Halkett's Foreign Levy joined Von der Decken's King's Germans. Experienced cavalrymen and artillerymen now began to be combed out from the infantry ranks in anticipation of the raising of a force of all arms. Major Halkett continued recruiting in England while LtCol von der Decken concentrated his efforts on the Continent.

In November the King's German Regiment moved once more, this time to Hilsea Barracks, Portsmouth. It was by now organised into two

light infantry battalions, originally intended as rifle corps and therefore uniformed in green; the cadre of a battalion of line infantry; and cadres for the formation of cavalry and artillery units.

In Hanover the French were reacting to the exodus. An announcement was published declaring that recruiting for the British service was to be punishable by death under martial law. This was required to be read out in churches on three successive Sundays. A Sergeant Ahrens, formerly of the Hanoverian infantry, was sentenced to 15 years in chains on conviction of recruiting activities. In spite of such draconian measures the flight of men for England and the King's German Regiment continued.

On 19 December 1803 the Duke of Cambridge received a letter-of-service authorising the formation of a 5,000-man corps of all arms, to be called the King's German Legion. Fifteen articles specified terms of service, rates of pay and bounties, pensions, discharge, unit establishments and so on, while Article III stated: 'Natives of France, Italy and Spain are not to be accepted under any circumstances, but your Royal Highness may take men of other European states, also Polish, Hungarians, Danes, Russians and Germans who reside in this country. No British subject may be accepted ... '. Article VIII declared that 'Officers and men will take an oath of Allegiance to His Majesty, and will be required to serve wherever His Majesty sees fit to send them.' Despite Article III the King's German Legion, on formation, was composed almost entirely of Hanoverians.

LtCol Colin Halkett. The first commander of the 2nd Light Battalion, KGL, Halkett had risen to the rank of major-general by 1815. He commanded the 5th Brigade at Waterloo, where he was severely wounded. He retired as a lieutenant-general. (Author's drawing after Pieneman)

Development of the Legion, 1803-1805

For the next two years the KGL grew steadily as more officers and men joined their ranks and new units were raised. A depot for the infantry was established at Bexhill in Sussex, but the accommodation there proved insufficient and tents and huts were put up to supplement it. (Christian von Ompteda, commanding the 1st Line Battalion, recorded in his diary how bad the weather was in October 1804, with storms and downpours turning the camp into a morass. He sensibly stayed in his tent.)

The cavalry of the KGL by then consisted of a regiment of Dragoons and a regiment of Light Dragoons, each of 450 horse. Quartered at Weymouth with two KGL horse artillery batteries, they proved favourites of King George III on his visits there. In August, recovering from one of his attacks of porphyria, he reviewed the KGL units, walking – according to Von Ompteda – amongst the men, talking of their homes and of the news from Hanover. Sympathising with the loss of their homeland, he encouraged the soldiers to trust in God, who had delivered him from his recent illness (described as mental disorder by Von Ompteda). His Majesty is recorded as appearing on these reviews dressed in the uniform of his German Dragoons. As time passed the Royal family continued to visit the units of the Legion. The King, the Prince of Wales and other members occasionally attended church parades, taking pleasure in the singing of hymns in German.

By early 1805 the units of the KGL were as follows:

Cavalry Brigade (MajGen von Linsingen)
1st King's German Dragoons (Colonel von Bock)
1st King's German Light Dragoons (Colonel Victor von Alten)

Light Infantry Brigade (Colonel Charles von Alten)
1st Light Battalion, KGL (Colonel Charles von Alten)
2nd Light Battalion, KGL (Lieutenant-Colonel Halkett)
1st Line Brigade (Colonel von Barsse)
1st Line Battalion, KGL (Colonel von Ompteda)
2nd Line Battalion, KGL (Colonel von Barsse)
2nd Line Brigade (Colonel von Langwerth)
3rd Line Battalion, KGL (Colonel von Hinüber)
4th Line Battalion, KGL (Colonel von Langwerth)
King's German Artillery
(Colonel-Commandant – Colonel von der Decken, who was also Adjutant-General to the KGL)
(Commander – Major von Linsingen)
1st Horse Battery (Captain Hartmann)
2nd Horse Battery (Captain Rõttiger)
1st Foot Battery (Captain Brückmann)
2nd Foot Battery (Captain Kuhlmann)
3rd Foot Battery (Captain Heise)
King's German Corps of Engineers
(This was an all-officer organisation)
Captains Berensbach, Prott and Meinecke
Lieutenants Hassebroik, Appuhn and Schweitzer.

At first Hanoverian units were permitted to follow the systems of exercise (basic drill) and manoeuvre to which they were accustomed, with words of command in their own language. They were soon required to follow the British system and words of command, however, especially when on parade with British troops. (Records show that guard mounting, a daily piece of ceremonial, was one of the first exercises conducted in English. British regulations were not entirely adopted until 1808.)

Recruits continued to make their way to the colours of the KGL, enabling the existing infantry battalions to be strengthened to an establishment of 1,000 each, including grenadier and light infantry companies. The virtual re-establishment in England of the Hanoverian Army had not escaped the attention of the French. In an act of reprisal they seized the property of officers serving with the KGL and put the families of former Hanoverian officers and men under surveillance.

A second regiment of light dragoons was raised in June 1805 as all units of the KGL prepared for active service in the light of events on the Continent. Britain's great sea victory at Trafalgar in October 1805 put paid to any plans nurtured by Napoleon for an invasion of England; and Austria and Russia had joined with Britain in coalition against the Emperor of the French, an action which committed Britain to send an army to north Germany. The King's German Legion were to be part of this force, and they looked forward to the liberation of their homeland.

Officer of the 2nd King's German Light Dragoons (or Hussars), c.1806. By this date a fur cap had been adopted, along with the pelisse and barrel-sash - all hussar dress distinctions. Note the peak attached to the cap, and the wearing of overalls. The 2nd had white facings and pelisse fur and gold lace for officers. (Watercolour by Aertz, courtesy Bomann Museum, Celle, Germany)

The expedition to Hanover, 1805-1806

A force of 18,000 men under Lord Cathcart set sail from Ramsgate and Deal on the coast of Kent in November, 6,000 of which were provided by units of the Legion. Despite disruptions caused by bad weather most

Colonel Christian von Ompteda, commander of the 1st Line Battalion, KGL, and colonel-commandant of the 5th Line; he was killed at Waterloo leading the 2nd Brigade. His letters and diaries offer many interesting insights into life in the King's German Legion. (Author's drawing)

of the British force were disembarked in Hanover and deployed by early January 1806, the KGL in the area of Verden.

However, Napoleon had wrong-footed the coalition with a series of French victories culminating in that at Austerlitz on 2 December 1805. While regrouping to fight these battles the French had evacuated Hanoverian territory except for the fortress of Hamelin, now invested by a force of Russian troops. To the Russians' aid went a line brigade and a foot battery of the King's German Legion. But the peace imposed by France upon Austria after the devastating defeat of Austerlitz forced her to give up her lands in Germany and Italy, and gave Hanover to the Prussians. The British force was ordered home, embarkation taking place in February 1806.

The brief appearance of the KGL in their homeland achieved a boost to recruiting if little else. Although 1,442 men took the opportunity to desert, many more enlisted, making possible the formation of two more cavalry units – a 2nd Dragoon and a 3rd Light Dragoon regiment; 5th, 6th and 7th Line Battalions; and a 4th Foot Battery of artillery. The 2nd Light Dragoons were made up to establishment, and a cadre of 300 men was formed for an 8th Line Battalion. By April 1806 recruiters in Hanover had enrolled 7,876 men. However, Hanover was by then occupied by the Prussians, who set about putting a stop to recruiting for the KGL (though not before a further 500 men had been enlisted).

Plans had been made to expand the KGL to an establishment of 20,000, but the Prussian action forced this to be revised to a figure of 14,000 men. It was at this figure that the establishment of the KGL was maintained for most of its continued existence. Records show that about 28,000 other ranks took service with the KGL from 1803 until its disbandment in 1816. This figure clearly indicates the wastage caused by death, wounds, sickness, capture and desertion.

CHARACTER AND ORGANISATION OF THE KING'S GERMAN LEGION

By now fully formed, and almost wholly Hanoverian, the King's German Legion was commanded by a body of former officers of the Hanoverian Army drawn from the nobility, landed gentry and middle classes. (There were 14 officers bearing the name Von der Decken, ten each of Von Düring and Von Brandis, and nine Von Linsingens.) These German officers took the profession of arms more seriously than their British counterparts, especially when it came to the instruction of their men. Most British officers considered it beneath their dignity to instruct their soldiers in the intricacies of drill, preferring to leave that task to non-commissioned officers. Officers of the KGL did not – and achieved very high standards of training as a consequence. Although ordered to adopt English drill movements and manoeuvres, some German practices were retained when thought superior. Such was the standard of competence within the officer corps of the KGL that many of its abler members rose to senior commands, including Gen Charles von Alten, who commanded a British division in the Peninsula, and Gen Victor von Alten, who led a cavalry brigade.

Private of the 3rd Hussars, KGL, 1812. By this time a shako had replaced the fur cap, which was impractical on service. The new headdress was decorated with white lace despite the fact that the facings and lace of the 3rd Hussars were yellow. (Watercolour by Aertz, courtesy Bomann Museum, Celle)

From the earliest days of the Legion there were more Hanoverian officer applicants than there were vacancies; thus the officer component of the KGL remained almost completely Hanoverian throughout its life, maintaining the tone and high standards of the original Legion to the end. (This was far from true of many foreign corps in British employment. The original flow of French Royalist émigré officers largely dried up after the Peace of Amiens, and as the war dragged on, putting ever greater pressure on sources of respectable military leadership, many dubious characters managed to secure commissions in these corps. Apart from the excellent Swiss regiments there were few to match the KGL – see MAA 328 & 335, *Émigré and Foreign Troops in British Service (1) 1793-1802, (2) 1803-1815.*)

Despite the quality of the officers, however, with direct recruiting in Hanover at an end it was necessary to have recourse to other sources of recruits, and these had the effect of diluting the Hanoverian nature of the rank-and-file of the King's German Legion. Hanoverians who had enlisted in units of the British Army were encouraged to seek transfers to the Legion; and Danes, Dutchmen, Swiss, Swedes, Hungarians, Poles and natives of other German states were cajoled to join as never before. As time went by and the need to replace casualties pressed, deserters and prisoners-of-war were enrolled into the ranks of KGL units, with an inevitable consequent lowering of standards.

In 1811 an attempt was made to raise the establishment of the KGL to 16,000 by tapping this source of renegades. Instructions were issued to ensure that 'None but such as are natives of Germany and speak, or at least understand German' were taken. By this authority anyone with a smattering of German who was prepared to lie about his place of birth could swear allegiance to King George and pocket a four-guinea bounty. Sent to the KGL depots in England to be equipped and trained, this unpromising material was fed back as replacements. Although some KGL units managed to retain a purely German character, others suffered from the influx of 'the scum of Europe', as will be seen.

Within the infantry each of the ten battalions of the KGL (two Light and eight Line) had ten companies. The establishment of a company was as follows:

1 captain (commanding)
2 lieutenants
1 ensign (junior officer)
5 sergeants
5 corporals (one of whom was the company quartermaster)
1 drummer (bugler in the Light infantry companies)
96 privates (from which were found a second drummer/bugler, pioneers, bandsmen, grooms and officers' servants).

Companies were designated alphabetically, 'A' being the Grenadier company and 'J', the junior, the Light company. Each battalion had a platoon of 'Sharpshooters' armed with rifles instead of smooth-bore muskets. This consisted of:

1 lieutenant (commanding)
2 sergeants

2 corporals
1 bugler
52 privates
(The Light battalions had a higher proportion of rifles to muskets.)

Each battalion had a colonel-commandant, but his duties rarely brought him into contact with his unit. At battalion headquarters were:
1 lieutenant-colonel (commanding)
2 majors
1 adjutant
1 paymaster
3 surgeons
1 quartermaster
1 sergeant-major
1 quartermaster-sergeant
1 paymaster-sergeant
1 armourer-sergeant

The colour party, pioneers, band, servants and helpers at battalion headquarters were all 'found' from within the companies.

The establishment for the five cavalry regiments of the KGL called for a regimental headquarters similar to that of the infantry battalion, but with the addition of a veterinary officer, a riding-master, a farrier and a saddler. There were four squadrons each of two troops; the troop establishment was:
1 captain (commanding)
1 lieutenant
1 cornet (junior officer)
1 quartermaster-sergeant (later, troop sergeant-major)
4 sergeants
4 corporals
1 trumpeter
76 privates

Troops were distinguished by letters, and squadrons by numbers. As in the infantry, posts such as trumpet-major,

Richard Knötel print of officers of the 1st Dragoons, KGL, 1806: left, 'service dress', and centre, 'parade dress'. The mounted figure is a 'staff officer', as surgeons, paymasters, etc. were termed; note that he wears epaulettes, in contrast to the squadron officers' shoulder wings. (Author's collection)

Richard Knötel print of a private of the 3rd King's German Light Dragoons (or Hussars), 1806. Some of the details of this fine drawing are suspect, as in much of Knötel's work, but it captures the spirit of the hussar on outpost duty. Note the peak attached to the fur cap, and the plaited side-locks. (Author's collection)

bandsmen, orderlies and servants were filled by men from the troops.

In the artillery, Horse and Foot, battery establishment varied according to role and the type of gun. These were 6-pounder, 9-pdr and 12-pdr guns and 5½in and 8in howitzers. A 9-pdr foot battery, for example, had four guns and two howitzers (5½in), each piece being served by one NCO and nine gunners. Eight horses drew each of these weapons. Total battery strength included:

1 captain (commanding)
1 second-captain
4 lieutenants
219 other ranks

The music of the KGL was much admired, and led more than one writer to comment on the high standard of their bands and the delightful way in which the men sang as they marched or sat around their campfires (their British comrades-in-arms apparently sung with vigour, but little skill). One of the Light battalions were recorded as singing 'glees' – songs in part harmony – as they marched the roads of Spain. Following a popular custom of the time, units of the KGL enlisted black musicians from the West Indies as cymbalists and drummers. These *'Janitscharen'* wore colourful costumes, in the style of Turkish mercenaries, and 'capered and swaggered' as they marched along.

Other customs enthusiastically copied from the British included the institution of officers' messes, fox-hunting, and the English love of games such as boxing and cricket.

IRELAND, POMERANIA AND COPENHAGEN 1806-1807

As Cathcart's expeditionary force made its ignominious journey back to England, Europe began adjusting to the 'peace' which Napoleon had imposed upon Austria. Not all were prepared to accept the settlement; but the Prussians' belligerence led to their own disastrous defeat at Napoleon's hands at Jena and Auerstadt in October 1806. With the Emperor's attention focused eastward, the large forces Britain had been forced to concentrate in south-eastern England were no longer necessary, and the units of the KGL found themselves redeployed throughout England and Ireland. The 2nd Dragoons went to Northampton where the regiment was brought up to strength. The 2nd Light Dragoons went to Canterbury, and the 3rd to Guildford. The 5th and 6th Line Battalions went to Winchester, where they were joined in May by the 7th and 8th Line Battalions. The artillery went to Porchester Barracks, Portsmouth, where a school of instruction for artillery officers and NCOs was established by Maj Rõttiger. To Ireland went the two Light Battalions, the 1st and 2nd Line Brigades (1st and

A spirited Knötel drawing of an officer and private of the 1st Light Battalion, KGL, c.1808. By this time the jackets of the 1st Light Bn had become distinctive in that those of the rank-and-file had a single row of buttons while their officers had two rows. (Author's collection)

2nd, 3rd and 4th Line Battalions), the 1st Dragoons and the 1st Light Dragoons.

Sea voyages were a hazardous undertaking under sail, particularly in the stormy seas surrounding the British Isles. The history of the KGL contains many harrowing accounts of shipwreck, with loss of life at sea adding to the toll of casualties sustained on the battlefield. The ships carrying the infantry battalions to Ireland in May 1806 were caught up in a violent gale which drove them out into the Atlantic for three days before they could seek shelter in Bantry Bay on the south-west coast of Ireland. From here they made their way to Cork, where the troops disembarked and set out to march to their new stations.

Scarcely had they settled in when orders were received for the 1st Line Brigade to take ship for Gibraltar, where they arrived in June. They were replaced in Ireland by the 3rd Line Brigade (5th and 6th Line Battalions). Most of the units of the KGL were by now serving in Ireland, a duty which they appear to have found most agreeable. Both officers and men found hospitality to be better than in England, and the cost of living cheaper. The gentry extended a welcome to the officers of the Legion, as did the more humble classes to the NCOs and men. (But the condition of the Irish poor shocked the Germans. Their houses caused Christian von Ompteda to record the opinion that there were probably none worse in any cultivated part of the world. Describing barter in the markets – where German money was preferred to English because it was heavier, and where an old pair of trousers could be bartered for a pig – he commented that it was like trading with wild native people.)

In July 1806, however, there occurred an incident which soured relationships between the German soldiers and the locals. Four companies of Irish Militia on line of march entered Tullamore (the station of the 1st Light Battalion and a squadron of the 1st Dragoons, KGL) seeking temporary accommodation. Refusing an invitation to dinner from the German officers, those of the Militia set about billeting their men for the night when, at about seven o'clock in the evening, a party of Militia assaulted a lone German soldier of the Light Battalion. Three other Germans were also beaten when they came to the aid of their comrade. The incident thus far was witnessed by MajGen von Linsingen from the dining room of a nearby hotel. He immediately called upon the militiamen to stop, but they merely paused in their mayhem, whereupon Gen von Linsingen called out a KGL patrol from the barracks, and sent for the officers of the Militia. He then ordered both the Militia and the Light Battalion to be paraded and roll calls to be taken; but before this could be accomplished events took a turn for the worse.

The KGL patrol had seized the ringleader of the Militia, at which point about 20 of his comrades prepared to charge the Germans with fixed bayonets. They were thwarted by Capt von Dürings' company,

which had been mustering in the town square, and which now drove the Militia back through the town – until they turned about and opened fire on the Germans, seven of whom were wounded. Nevertheless, Dürings' men pressed on and pursued the Militia as they retired, still firing on the KGL, one musket ball wounding Lt Marchack in the chest. At the first sound of musketry Gen von Linsingen had ordered out a detachment of the 1st Dragoons, and at their head he charged the main body of the Militia despite heavy fire. By this time the Dragoons were not inclined to show mercy, and their actions rapidly ended the affray. The affair at Tullamore left the KGL with three officers, 22 men and five horses wounded (one of the wounded men later dying), and the Militia with nine wounded, one of whom later died. The imbalance of casualties was due to the fact that the Militia had ammunition and the KGL did not.

Subsequent courts of enquiry failed to find the cause of the violence, but held the conduct of certain Militia officers to have been 'reprehensible'. Courts martial sentenced eight of the Militia ringleaders to 'severe' punishments. The behaviour of the KGL officers and men was held to have been 'honourable', the King confirming to Gen von Linsingen that his 'high opinion' of his Hanoverian officers and men remained unshaken.

Knötel drawing of a private and officer of the 2nd Light Battalion, KGL, c.1808. The 2nd Light Bn retained the traditional jacket design with three rows of buttons. Their officers adopted a 'mirleton' cap, which the other ranks copied by cutting off the peaks of their issued shakos. (Author's collection)

Over the winter of 1806/1807 orders for overseas service were issued and countermanded until eventually, in April 1807, eight KGL infantry battalions, two regiments of cavalry, and four batteries of the artillery found themselves marching to ports of embarkation to join another expedition to northern Europe.

The King of Sweden, having turned down Napoleon's offers of peace, anticipated a French invasion of his territories in Pomerania. To his assistance went a British force, which set sail in late May only to encounter adverse weather, during which the transport carrying men of the 2nd Light Battalion foundered, fortunately without loss of life. Only on 8 July did the expedition begin arriving at its destination, the island of Rügen on the coast of Swedish Pomerania opposite the fortress of Stralsund, and it took until the 15th for the force to disembark. The 6th, 7th and 8th Line Battalions moved into Stralsund, which was now under attack by the French, and took part in a vigorous sally on 6 August to prevent the French from pushing closer. Eventually they had to yield to superior force and retire within the fortress walls. (It was eventually given up to the French on 19 August.)

Events elsewhere were to curtail the co-operation of the KGL with the Swedes. France's victory over the Russians at Friedland in June forced the Czar to come to terms, and Napoleon now put pressure on the Danes to force them to prevent the passage of British shipping to the Baltic Sea, and to add the Danish navy to his. Britain countered by demanding that the Danes sail their fleet to a British port where it would be interned.

A Richard Knötel print of Dragoons of the KGL, 1812. The equipment is incorrect, and overalls were worn on service, but otherwise this is how 'Bock's Heavy Germans' would have appeared at Garcia Hernandez. (Author's collection)

When this demand was rejected the British set out on a pre-emptive strike, sending a fleet which arrived off Copenhagen on 3 August.

The fleet brought with them the KGL 1st Line Brigade and the 1st Light Dragoons. When the Rügen force was ordered to Copenhagen the whole King's German Legion was assembled with the exception of the two dragoon regiments and two artillery batteries. The three KGL light dragoon regiments – the force's only cavalry – were assembled as a brigade under MajGen von Linsingen. The ten KGL infantry battalions formed the 2nd Division under the Earl of Rosslyn, and the four batteries of KGL artillery were under the command of Maj Röttiger. (Five Legion engineer officers were also present.) Of a total force of 26,000 men, 10,000 were thus provided by the King's German Legion.

Opposing the British were a Danish garrison of 14,000 in Copenhagen and about 11,000 other troops inland. The British began landing on the 16th at Wedbeck, several miles from Copenhagen. They met little resistance as they approached the city, and by the following morning had it completely invested. Clashes with the defenders occurred and fire was opened on the British lines from Danish gunboats within the harbour, but these quickly came under fire from the British ships without. Both sides settled into a siege.

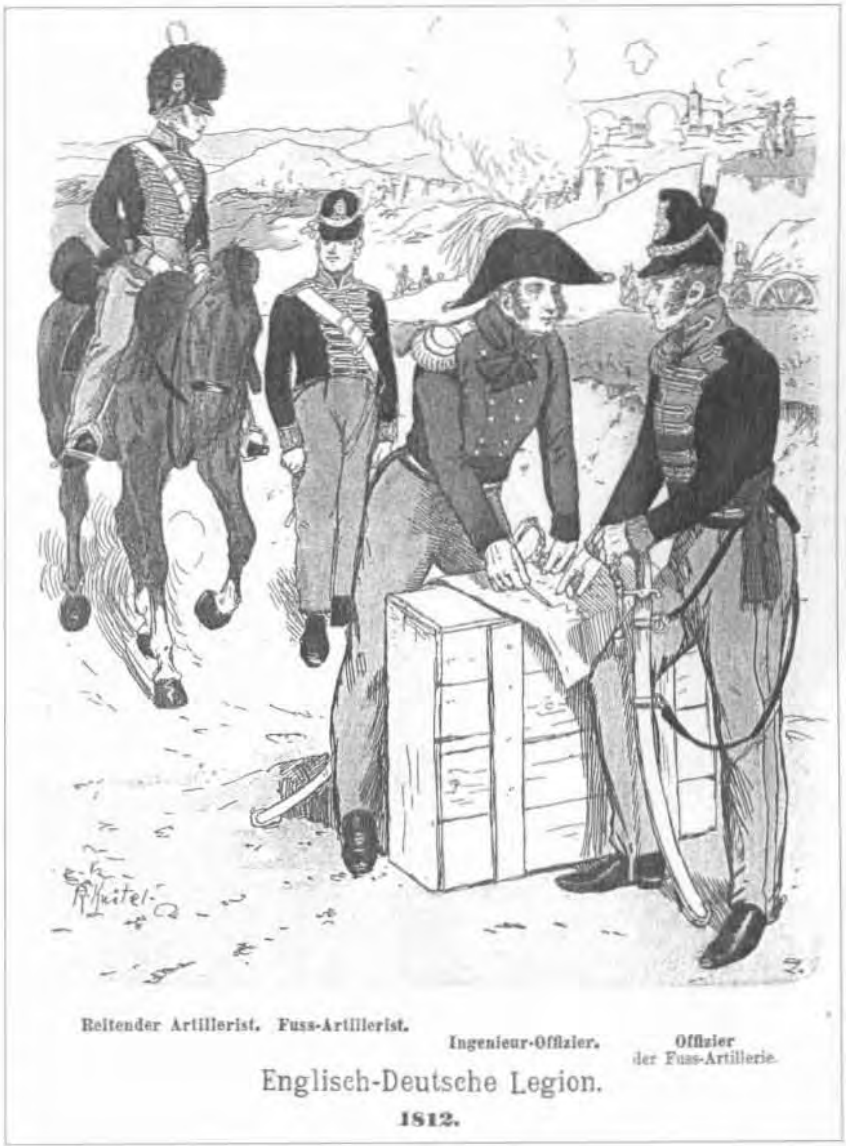
Inland, the first encounters were between the KGL cavalry and Danish militia. One of these had an element of farce when, on the 18th, the fortress of Friedericksweik about 20 miles from Copenhagen surrendered to a squadron of the 1st King's German Light Dragoons after a massive bluff on the part of their commander, Capt Krauchenberg. Conducting a reconnaissance with Gen von der Decken, he learned that a convoy of ammunition wagons, well escorted, was on its way to Friedericksweik. He attempted to cut off the convoy and effect its capture but, failing to find it, he pressed on to Friedericksweik itelf, arriving at one o'clock in the morning. Krauchenberg then surprised a Danish picquet and sent its commander into the fortress with an ultimatum that 'General von der Decken, at the head of an army of ten thousand men', was on the march to Friedericksweik, which would be taken by storm if it did not immediately surrender. Surrender they did: 860 men, an arsenal of guns, small arms and powder. Unable to carry off all this ordnance, Gen von der Decken contented himself with four guns and half of the small arms, having extracted promises from the governor that the remainder would not be used against the British. But as daylight broke the bluff could no longer be sustained, the size of the small force being obvious. The angry locals armed themselves and attempted to harass the withdrawal of Von der Decken and his men, but they managed to evade the mobs and reached their own lines with captives and booty.

In a more serious action on the 21st, a squadron of the 3rd King's German Light Dragoons surprised a Danish outpost near Roeskilde, killing 16 of the enemy, capturing three and taking 45 horses.

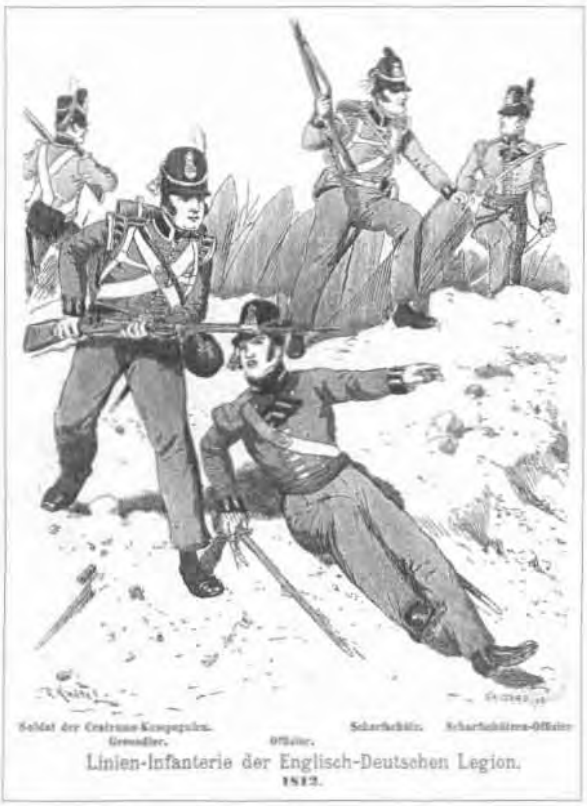
One of the British generals with the covering force was Sir Arthur Wellesley, commanding the Reserve; and it was here that he and the KGL were to see each other in action for the first time. Under his command he had eight KGL squadrons of cavalry, the 6th Line Battalion, and the horse artillery of the Legion. On 26 August Wellesley's command fought an action near Kioge, decisively defeating a Danish force to ensure that the forces investing Copenhagen did so without interruption. In this battle and the subsequent pursuit the cavalry of the KGL fought with great courage and skill. Lieutenant Jansen of the 3rd Light Dragoons received a gift from Sir Arthur of a case of handsome pistols, and a letter expressing the general's appreciation of Jansen's distinguished conduct that day.

On 2 September the bombardment of Copenhagen began, being at first answered by a vigorous counter-bombardment. But soon the city began to burn, the population began to flee, and hundreds of buildings were destroyed before the capitulation of the city and the surrender of the Danish fleet on the 7th. (During the siege leaflets had been addressed to the men of the KGL stating, 'You Hanoverians we consider as innocent people, forced to accomplish the cruel commands of your government – Do not obey – The Danes will always receive you like friends – Hasten hither! – Hanoverians! Harken to the voice of friendship and reason!'. This was a striking example of psychological warfare years before the title was coined.)

By late October the British force was embarked and on its way home, accompanied by the vessels of the Danish fleet – a total of one thousand sail. With them went 1,000 recruits for the KGL – Danes, Swedes, Poles and Germans



This Richard Knötel print shows, left to right: a mounted private of the KGL Horse Artillery; a private of KGL Foot Artillery; a KGL Engineer; and an officer of KGL Foot Artillery - all 1812. The two foot artillerymen are shown wearing the 1812 pattern 'Belgic' shako; authorised in December 1811, this item probably did not become general issue until 1813. (Author's collection)



Richard Knötel print of Line infantry of the KGL in 1812. Again, it is doubtful if they had the 1812 pattern shako at this time; and Knötel also shows them incorrectly with dark blue shoulder wings and turnbacks. Note the grey trousers then coming into service. From left to right the print shows a private of a 'centre' company, a grenadier private, a centre company officer, and a 'sharpshooter' and his officer. (Author's collection)

– enlisted from the ranks of Danish prisoners and foreign deserters. But the wind that filled the sails turned rapidly into a violent storm on the 22nd, dispersing the combined fleets and scattering vessels out into the North Sea. The storms continued for many days, resulting in the foundering of several transports carrying men and animals of the King's German Legion. Of the total KGL casualties on this expedition – 1,175 – more than 500 lost their lives at sea on the return journey. The greatest loss of life occurred when the *Salisbury* went down, taking with her nine officers, 212 men, 30 women and five children of the 2nd Line Battalion.

Colonel von Ompteda with three companies of his unit, the 1st Line Battalion, were in the transport *Augustus Caesar* which, after a collision with a man-of-war, was dismasted and holed. Driven ashore in Holland, the survivors were at first fired upon and then made prisoner. The nine officers amongst them were paroled and eventually exchanged with French officers held prisoner in England. The NCOs and men were less fortunate. Being held to be natives of the newly-formed 'Kingdom of Westphalia', they were obliged to enter the service of the French, from which they took the earliest opportunity to desert.

(Survivors of the expedition to Copenhagen were to enjoy a payment of prize money for the seizure of the Danish fleet. This ranged from £1,500 for a general to £2 for a private soldier – in the latter case, 40 days' gross pay.)

THE PENINSULA 1808-1812

In the aftermath of the storm the scattered regiments were scarcely assembled when orders were given for the 3rd, 4th, 6th and 8th Line Battalions and the 3rd Foot Battery to embark as part of an expedition of 7,000 men originally intended for Portugal. The fleet bearing it left Portsmouth in late December, encountering the usual bad weather which obliged most of the ships to return to England. In the meantime Lisbon had been occupied by the French; the bad weather persisted, and it was not until April 1808 that the force finally landed – not in Portugal, but at Messina, Sicily. It reinforced the defenders of that island, and the following year made a successful raid on the Italian mainland. The King's German Legion units continued to contribute to the defence of Sicily against invasion in 1810.

In England a further expedition to the Baltic was being mounted. Among the units committed were the KGL 3rd Light Dragoons, the 1st Light Infantry Brigade, the 1st, 2nd, 5th and 7th Line Battalions and two foot batteries. Commanding the enterprise was another general under whom the KGL would see service in the Peninsula, Sir John Moore. The expedition set sail for Gothenburg in May 1808; but the King of Sweden

would agree with no plan proposed by Moore. After riding at anchor for six weeks, no doubt in considerable discomfort for the troops, the British force was ordered home. As soon as it returned, without disembarking the troops, it was immediately ordered to sail for Portugal.

Events in the Iberian Peninsula were beginning to move in favour of the British. Elsewhere in Europe Napoleon's armies had conquered or cowed into submission all who challenged his will. But his attempts to subdue Spain and Portugal were to prove an expensive and long-drawn-out irritant and eventually a disaster. Until this time the regime ruling Spain – headed nominally by the dim-witted and complaisant King Carlos IV, but actually by the Queen's lover Manuel Godoy – had been Napoleon's more or less willing ally, sending troops to serve with his Grande Armée in Germany and colluding in his attempt to close down Portuguese trade with Britain. In August 1807 Portuguese shipping was embargoed from all French ports. The following month a French army corps was admitted to Spain in order to menace Portugal. In the same month Napoleon told the Portuguese ambassador: 'The English say they will not respect neutrals at sea. I will not respect them on land.' The Portuguese were obliged to bow to French pressure, and French troops advanced through Spain to occupy Lisbon on 30 November 1807.

The march was their first taste of the conditions in the Peninsula; the roads and the weather were unbearable, torturing the men and killing hundreds of horses. Stragglers by the thousand marked the route the French had taken, and which had been covered so slowly that the Portuguese fleet had been able to escape to Brazil with their Royal family. The Portuguese, in their turn, now had their first experience of French occupation, enduring looting and 'requisitioning' by the French troops. Napoleon demanded 100 million francs to cover the cost of his invasion; and then set about picking a quarrel with his erstwhile ally Spain.

The ostensible issue was the suggested marriage of his niece to the Crown Prince, but Napoleon's intrigues set all factions against one another. A major riot at Arranjuez in March 1808 broke Godoy's grip on power. In April Carlos IV reluctantly abdicated in favour of his son Fernando VII, and the resulting furore gave Napoleon the excuse he needed to begin a military occupation. But this act of arrogance was too much for the people of Spain, and a popular revolt against the French occupiers began with a bloodbath in Madrid on 2 May, quickly followed by uprisings all over Spain, in which atrocities were carried out by both sides. Napoleon forced Fernando to abdicate in his turn on 6 June, and appointed his brother Joseph – until now his puppet King of Naples – as King of Spain.

With no central direction, *'juntas'* brought out the regions in arms to drive the French from their lands. At Bailen in Andalucia on 19 July 1808 Gen Castanos achieved a shattering victory over Gen Dupont's French army, giving hope to all Spanish

Richard Knötel print of the Light troops of the King's German Legion in 1812. On the left are an officer and men of the 1st Light Bn, on the right the 2nd. Note the differences in jackets and caps. Knötel shows the 1st Light Bn wearing a tuft rising from a ball, and the rankers of the 2nd a ball - both contrary to the regulations of the day. (Author's collection)

patriots. It was to be one of very few Spanish successes in pitched battle; but the next five years would see regional armies struggling on with stubborn courage against the French occupiers and despoilers of much of their country. Simultaneously, tens of thousands of military stragglers, vengeful peasants and urban patriots would take to the hills and forests to wage irregular warfare. These *'guerrilleros'* fought using tactics that the French would find increasingly difficult to counter, harrying French lines of communication and tying down many thousands of troops which would have been better employed in the French field armies. Meanwhile British ships brought Gen Romana's Spanish army corps home from Germany to join the war; and from the first months of the uprising until the end of the war huge quantities of British arms, uniforms, and supplies of all kinds were shipped to Spain to sustain the struggle.

As soon as the war broke out the Central Junta based at Seville made peace with Britain, and in June 1808 an expedition was assembled under LtGen Sir Arthur Wellesley for service in the Peninsula. No KGL units served with this force which, after winning the battle of Vimiero on 20 August, forced the French commander in Portugal to seek terms. These were negotiated with Wellington's recently arrived superior, Sir Hugh Dalrymple, and became the infamous Convention of Cintra by which 24,000 French troops were conveyed home in British ships with all their arms and loot. When the news of this folly reached England Dalrymple was sacked, and Wellesley – though quite innocent of responsibility – was removed to a post in Ireland. Command now devolved on Sir John Moore, who had arrived with the troops he had taken to Sweden.

The well-known Charles Hamilton-Smith print of men of the KGL; although it was published in 1815, Hamilton-Smith drew from details taken much earlier. He shows the Line infantryman (left) with cap-lines on his 1812 pattern shako taken from a grenadier fur cap, dark blue (Guards pattern) wings and dark blue turnbacks. The Light infantryman (centre) is probably from the 2nd Light Battalion; note the mirleton cap with a bugle horn badge on the cockade, the three rows of buttons, and the fact that he is armed with a musket, not a rifle. The trooper of the 3rd Hussars (right) is depicted in the uniform worn from 1812, with white cap lace and cords but yellow uniform facings; the pelisse shows a scarlet lining. (Author's collection)

Moore's men began disembarking at Maceira Bay on 25 August, a difficult operation through rolling surf which took four days to accomplish. (The horses of the KGL 3rd Light Dragoons had been 17 weeks aboard ship, and were in very poor condition; 40 had already died, and when examined ashore only half were found fit for service.)

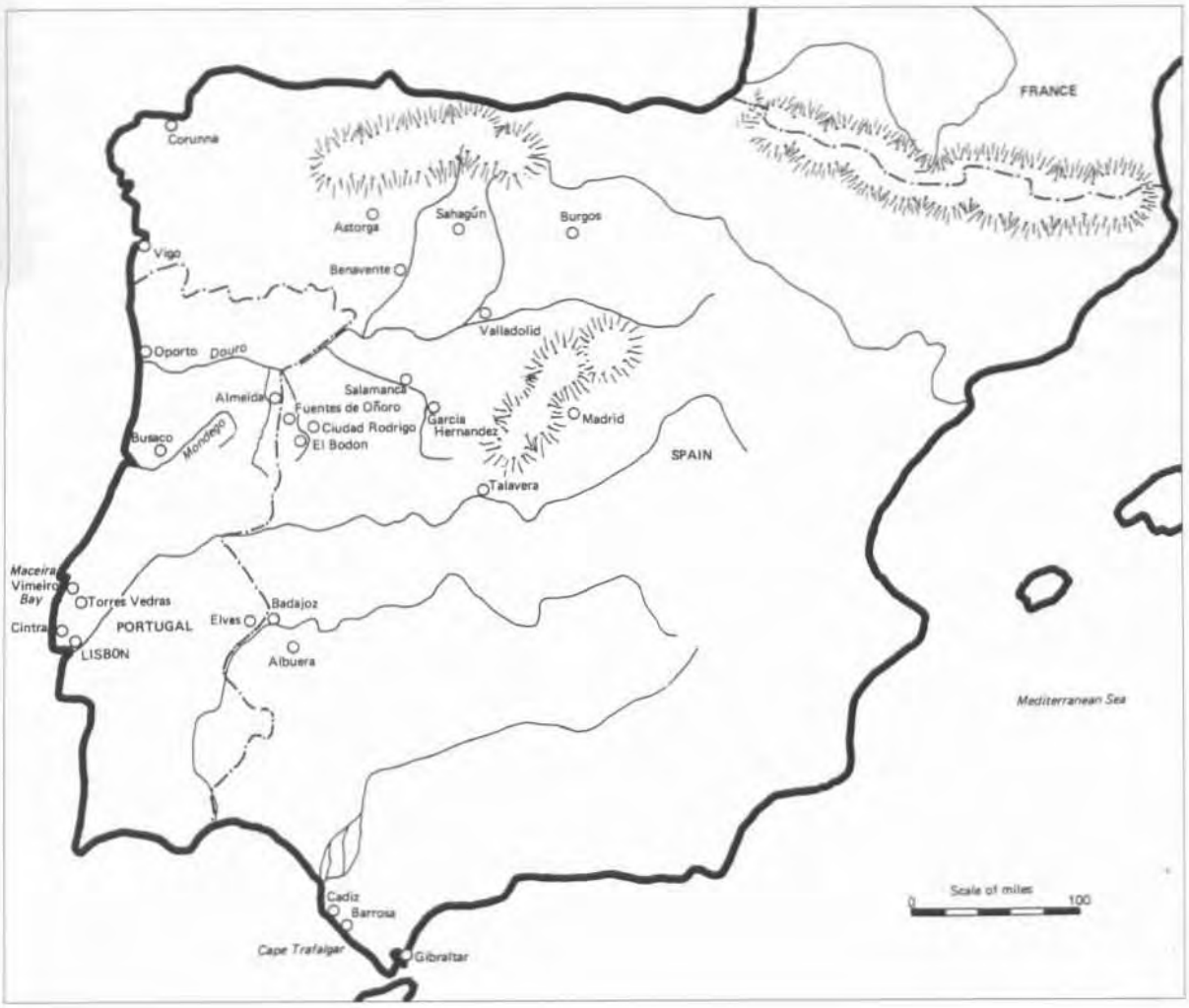
Moore's instructions were to co-operate with the Spanish armies, but it was October before he was ready to march his army into Spain to join them. By this time a French army of

three corps of 100,000 men under Napoleon himself were in contact with the Spanish in the north where, after a series of battles in November, the patriots were driven back. Napoleon re-occupied Madrid on 4 December. He now turned to deal with Moore, who was unaware of his enemy's strength and disposition, was dangerously isolated at Salamanca, but was preparing to strike at Napoleon's lines of communications at Valladolid. By a piece of extraordinary good luck a set of French orders fell into Moore's hands, giving him his first idea of the size of the enemy forces in Spain (by then 200,000), their deployment, and Napoleon's intentions. He marched his army north to Sahagun intending to attack the French there.

The Retreat to Corunna

With Moore's army were the 3rd King's German Light Dragoons (by this time styled 'Hussars', and hereafter referred to by that title) and the Light Brigade of the KGL; the Line Brigades and artillery of the Legion had remained in Portugal. Moore had by now been joined by a force under Sir David Baird which had landed at Corunna, to bring his total force to 2,278 cavalry, 19,053 infantry and 60 guns. On 20 December the

The Iberian Peninsula, 1808-1812, with locations of some of the KGL's engagements.



British 15th Hussars defeated a body of French cavalry at Sahagun as the British moved on Burgos; but on the 23rd intelligence finally revealed to Moore the extreme danger which threatened his outnumbered and isolated army. He ordered withdrawal to Vigo.

During the retreat that then took place the Legion's 3rd Hussars played an important role in screening the rearguard, frequently clashing with enemy cavalry. (At Benevente on 29 December Private Johann Bergmann took prisoner the French General Lefebvre-Desnouettes in one such contact, in which the 3rd Hussars incurred 46 casualties but inflicted 200 on the enemy). At Astorga on the 30th Moore split his forces, sending the British and KGL Light Brigades under the command of BrigGen von Alten to the port of Vigo, whilst he led the main force to Corunna.

The march of Von Alten's men over mountainous countryside, in bitter weather and through deep snow, mirrored the suffering of the main body falling back on Corunna. Hampered by large groups of straggling Spanish troops on a route where – in places – no road existed, many men of the KGL were lost. The survivors reached the evacuation port on 12 January 1809, and embarkation began the following day as stragglers drifted in. When the fleet eventually sailed they left behind 131 men of the KGL, most of whom had perished on the road from Astorga. (Enquiries subsequently found most of them to have been enlisted in Denmark after the battle of Copenhagen.)

To the north Moore's army struggled into Corunna and turned to give battle to the pursuing French on 16 January 1809, driving them back and inflicting 2,000 casualties on their tormentors. Moore had lost over 5,000 men during the retreat, and he now became one of the British casualties at the battle of Corunna. He was buried in the citadel just before the British fleet sailed on the 18th. With them went the 3rd Hussars KGL, who had the distressing task of shooting 290 of their horses on the beach before embarkation.

The voyages back to England were marked by the sinking of the transport *Smallbridge* with the loss of the crew and over 200 officers, men, wives and children of the KGL Light Brigade. Disembarkation of the ragged regiments was followed by a long period of reinforcement and re-equipping before any were ready to take the field again. (A survivor of the *Smallbridge* was one Cornelius Plugge, a Dutchman serving with the 2nd Light Battalion, who managed to get ashore at Ushant in one of the ship's boats. He was imprisoned at Arras; escaped; was recaptured, and given the option of being shot or joining the French 'Irish Brigade'. Plugge chose life and was sent to Spain with the regiment's 3rd Battalion. On 1 November 1810 he deserted to the British lines at Sobral, bringing with him nine of his comrades – none of whom was Irish.)

Details of the 1800 pattern shako worn by the rank-and-file of the KGL from 1803 until about 1806/07. Seven inches in height, it was made of leather and lacquered fabric. It is shown here 'exploded' into its component parts. Note the brass plate, 6ins x 4ins, held to the shako by wires; and the black leather cockade, through which a regimental button, bugle horn or grenade badge was pushed – for centre, light and grenadier companies respectively – to be secured by the wire of the woollen tuft, which was then inserted into a loop on the front upper edge of the shako. The tuft was 4ins long, white for grenadiers and artillery, green for light infantry, and white-over-red for all other troops. (Author's drawing)

1809: Wellesley's return

Napoleon had left Spain upon Moore's retreat; he considered the Peninsula a sideshow compared to

his problems at home and with Austria. Spain would continue to be a running sore on his southern border, a continuing drain on his manpower and treasure that would prove one of the major factors contributing to his downfall. But in 1809 this was unforeseeable, and he confidently left the conduct of the campaign to his marshals.

In April 1809 Sir Arthur Wellesley, now cleared of any blame for the Convention of Cintra, found himself appointed to command the Anglo-Portuguese forces in Portugal. Here his 25,000 men included a troop of the KGL 3rd Hussars, detachments of the 1st and 2nd Light Battalions, the 1st, 2nd, 5th and 7th Line Battalions, and two batteries of foot artillery – 3,300 men all told. (The 'Sharpshooters' of the Line battalions and the detachments of the Light battalions were at this time grouped together as a unit of riflemen. The 3rd Hussars troop were operating with the British 14th Light Dragoons.)

The advancing French had occupied northern Portugal and Wellesley moved to contact them, attacking the 20,000-strong army of Marshal Soult on 12 May at Oporto after forcing a crossing of the River Douro. He compelled Soult to withdraw with the loss of 6,000 men, their artillery and their baggage. Having secured northern Portugal Wellesley turned to face the threat on its eastern frontier, where Marshal Victor led another 22,000 men. En route he collected 5,000 reinforcements from England, including the 1st Hussars of the KGL (the troop of 3rd Hussars now returned to England.)

By early July Wellesley's army had moved into Spain in order to co-operate with Gen Cuesta's Spanish army of 32,000 men. Cuesta was old and unpredictable (to put it generously), and there were several false starts before the Allied armies brought the French to battle at Talavera on 27 July.

The 'universal' cockade worn in most headdress, its black colour signifying a soldier of Britain or Hanover. Made of silk ribbon for officers, and - as here - stamped from leather for the rank-and-file, it was usually secured to the cap by a regimental button. (Author's drawing)

The design for the garter and centre of the shako plate of the King's German Legion foot artillery, taken from Hawkes' metal badge book, 1804. Compared to the universal plate that of the artillery was smaller and of a different shape. For the KGL the title shown replaced the motto *HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE*. (Author's drawing)

Talavera

The combined French forces under Victor, Sebastiani and King Joseph numbered over 46,000 with 80 guns, some 3,000 of the soldiers being Germans from Napoleon's 'Confederation of the Rhine'. After a battle which raged for two days they withdrew, having sustained losses of 7,358 men – 1,000 of them Germans – and 17 guns. The Anglo-Portuguese had 5,361 casualties of which 1,407 were from units of the KGL; Spanish losses were given as 1,207. Talavera was a bloody affair in which units of the King's German Legion had their first experience of a real battle, a tactically unimaginative face-to-face killing match between major armies. The 1st and 2nd Line were brigaded under Von Langwerth, the 5th and 7th under Von Lowe, in Sherbrooke's 1st Division holding the Medellin hill which formed the anchor of Wellesley's centre left.

They had an uneasy start when a night attack led by the French 9th Light Infantry of Ruffin's Division caught Von Lowe's men unprepared and pushed them back before 'Daddy' Hill led a successful British

counterattack. Thereafter the KGL fought well, and laid the foundations of what was to become an enviable reputation. During a third major French assault on the Medellin hill by the divisions of Lapisse and Sebastiani the 5th Line Battalion made a spirited counterattack on the latter's 28th Regiment. In hand-to-hand fighting the 5th Line killed 428 of the enemy in little more than half an hour; carried away, the Germans and the neighbouring Foot Guards followed the retreating enemy too far and were badly mauled by the French second line. The 1st Hussars also distinguished themselves in a charge in which they had the misfortune of encountering a hidden ravine which brought down many of the first rank of horses and riders. Selected for particular praise by Sir Arthur Wellesley was the KGL artillery under Major Hartmann, Sir Arthur mentioning Bombardier Dierking for personally directing the fire of his gun. Among the dead of the French 28th Regiment the 5th Line found three standards – reported at the time as 'Eagles', though they were probably one Eagle and two other flags – which they presented to Sir Arthur. (As a consequence of Talavera, he was enobled that September as Viscount Wellington of Talavera and Baron Douro of Wellesley in the county of Somerset.)

News from the north now suggested that the approach of another 45,000 French under Soult, Ney and Mortier was threatening Wellesley's communications with Portugal. A rapid retreat had to be made if the Allied army was not to be cut off and destroyed; by a series of forced marches they withdrew across the frontier, and the hungry and exhausted French turned away. But Wellington knew that another attempt to retake Portugal was inevitable, and he settled down to prepare for it. Refusing any further direct co-operation with the Spanish armies after his experiences in 1809, he began to construct and garrison a great triple cordon of fortifications known as the Lines of Torres Vedras. Guarded by forts garrisoned mostly by Portuguese militia, this was to turn the Lisbon peninsula into a vast fortress into which not only his field army, but also huge numbers of civilians with their flocks and herds, could retreat at need. He then rested and re-organised his army – half of which was, by the year 1810, Portuguese – and deployed it to guard all three main corridors of invasion.

1810: Busaco

The French continued widespread operations against various Spanish armies, but it was not until the summer of 1810 that – now commanded by Marshal Masséna – they advanced on Portugal via Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida. Wellington's rearguards held them off skilfully while the main force fell back in good order towards Lisbon and the Lines of Torres Vedras, taking with them the local population, driving their herds and carrying what they could. What had to be left for the French was put to the torch. During this retirement the KGL 1st Hussars, operating with the Light Division, were constantly on duty screening the rearguard, manning outposts, and gaining a reputation for superb vigilance, horsemanship and swordsmanship in many clashes with enemy cavalry. (Private Schroeder, for example, eventually notched up 12 kills with the sword, many woundings, and took 27 prisoners). From this time the cavalry of the KGL were acknowledged as the best in the Anglo-Portuguese army.

LIGHT CAVALRY, 1805-1808

1: Private, 2nd King's German Light Dragoons, 1805

2: Private, 3rd King's German Light Dragoons (Hussars); Spain, 1808

LINE INFANTRY, 1805

1: Sergeant, drill order

2: Recruit, drill order

3: Captain, full dress

4: Drummer, full dress

LINE INFANTRY, 1811

1: Sergeant of a Grenadier Company, guard-mounting order

2: Corporal, Grenadier Company, 2nd Line Battalion

3: Junior officer

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LIGHT INFANTRY

1: Corporal, King's German Regiment, 1803

2: Private, 2nd Light Battalion, KGL, 1809

3: Officer, 1812

LIGHT INFANTRY, SPAIN, 1811

1: Sergeant-bugler, 2nd Light Battalion

2: 'Sharpshooter', 1st Light Battalion

3: 'Sharpshooter' of a Line battalion

2ND KING'S GERMAN DRAGOONS, SPAIN, 1812

1: Private, marching order

2: Corporal, marching order

KING'S GERMAN ARTILLERY, 1807

1: Bombardier, marching order

2: Officer

GUIDON AND INSIGNIA

See page 47 for commentaries

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Wellington's army reached Busaco on 25 September 1810, and deployed in a ridge-top position long ago chosen by their commander (and improved with a new lateral road). Two days later the 24,000 British and 25,000 Portuguese inflicted over 5,000 casualties on the two French corps which attacked them there. In this classic defensive battle Allied losses were about 1,000; 50 of these were from the King's German Legion, whose 1st, 2nd, 5th and 7th Line Battalions and a detachment from the 1st Light were brigaded together under Von Lowe. During the battle they were separated from the rest of Spencer's 1st Division, forming a solid second line behind Campbell's less experienced Portuguese – who in fact behaved admirably. From Busaco Wellington withdrew into the 500-square-mile redoubt of the Lines of Torres Vedras by mid-October, where reinforcements and plentiful supplies were waiting.

Masséna was taken by surprise by the scale of the fortifications, in front of which he deployed part of his army whilst the remainder foraged for food. Wellington drew down Portuguese militia on the French rear, and sent cavalry patrols – including the Legion's 3rd Hussars – out from the lines to harass the enemy. In March 1811, with his army on the point of starvation, Masséna gave up and began a retreat into Spain, followed close on his heels by Wellington's troops.

In 1806 the 1800 pattern shako was replaced by one of leather and felt; later this was reinforced on the crown and band for the Light battalions, to produce the pattern illustrated here with the button of the 2nd Light Bn and the crowned bugle horn badge worn from 1803 to about 1812. Note the green tuft and cap cords. (Author's drawing)

1811: Barrossa

In southernmost Spain the French were laying siege to the Junta forces in the port of Cadiz. To their aid went Gen Sir Thomas Graham and a force of 8,000 men which included two squadrons of the 2nd Hussars of the Legion. When Marshal Victor began to thin out his besieging force, an Allied raid was mounted when 10,000 Spanish and 4,500 British troops were landed behind the enemy lines. On 5 March 1811 the British element clashed with 7,000 French troops at Barrossa. Despite requests for support Gen La Pena's Spanish remained inactive, and the battle hung in the balance as the French cavalry prepared to charge the British flank. It was at this point that the 2nd Hussars charged them, broke them, captured two cannon, and won the day. The French lost two generals, an Eagle, 2,400 men, six guns and over 400 prisoners. The total British losses were 1,100 men, of which the 2nd Hussars lost one dead, 33 wounded and 46 horses.

Fuentes de Oñoro

In the van of Wellington's army as they followed the French into Spain were the KGL 1st Hussars, who in April 1811 clashed with enemy cavalry after the action at Sabugal, capturing 94 men, 90 horses, and 25 pack animals containing the baggage of Marshal Soult. By May Portugal was once more free of the French except for the fortress of Almeida. Close by, Masséna concentrated his ragged and starving army at Ciudad Rodrigo in order to reorganise them. (Since Busaco he had lost 30,000 men without fighting a battle worthy of the name.) Within weeks he built his command into a force of

5,000 horse, 40,000 foot, and 30 guns and turned to the offensive.

Wellington's attention was focused on the siege of Almeida which Masséna now attempted to raise. On 5 May he was driven back at the battle of Fuentes de Oñoro, but not until the French garrison at Almeida had managed to break out and join him. Present at the battle were the KGL 1st Hussars; two detached Light companies and the 1st, 2nd, 5th and 7th Line Battalions, again brigaded under Von Lowe in the 1st Division on Wellington's right. These units lost 155 men out of the total Allied casualties of 1,500; no accurate figure for the French losses can be quoted, one source claiming as many as 5,000. Masséna withdrew to Salamanca, and was dismissed by Napoleon. His successor was Marshal Marmont.

Albuera

Further south LtGen Sir William Beresford was laying siege to Badajoz when he received news of the approach of a French army under Marshal Soult. Abandoning the siege, Beresford met the 30,500 French at Albuera where, on 16 May 1811, there took place one of the bloodiest battles of the whole Peninsular War. Beresford had an Anglo-Portuguese-Spanish army of 29,000 men, including the Legion's 1st and 2nd Light Battalions (back in the Peninsula after taking part in the disastrous expedition to the island of Walcheren), and two foot artillery batteries. The Light Brigade of the KGL, led by Charles von Alten, were ordered to defend the village of Albuera on the Allied left. During the battle French cavalry broke into the infantry formations on the Allied right wing and wreaked great execution before the situation could be stabilised. The British lost 892 killed and 2,707 wounded at Albuera; the Spanish had about 2,000 casualties, and the Portuguese about 600; while 500 Allied prisoners, a howitzer and several colours were lost to the French – who in turn lost about 8,000 killed and wounded. The KGL Light Brigade had 107 casualties, while the Legion batteries lost 48 men, 34 horses and a howitzer. When the killing match was over the French withdrew, but it had been a Pyrrhic victory for Beresford (who at one point in the battle had to draw his sword to defend himself).

Exhausted after the day's fighting, Heinrich Heine of the 2nd Light Battalion KGL found it impossible to sleep because of the rain (in which the battle had been fought), the cold, and the vile smell of the dead and wounded. While looking for food in the village he came upon Capt Heise of his battalion, shot through the head and in so much pain that he begged Heine to shoot him. After doing what he could to comfort the captain he returned to his post, to discover in the dawn that he had been sleeping on a corpse. The new day was hot and the cries of the wounded calling for water from the mass of dead bodies on the battlefield stirred Heine and his comrades to take

BELOW **The jacket of a sergeant of the Grenadier Company, 4th Line Battalion, KGL, reconstructed from photographs of a surviving example in the Bomann Museum, Celle. It has both wings and tufts, and chevrons of rank on the right arm only - a contradiction of regulations. (Author's drawing)**

their canteens to them, once more ignoring their requests to be put out of their misery. That evening, as he marched from the battlefield, he records that he saw what he thought was the corpse of Capt Heise. (Heise was certainly dying, but not yet dead; he was taken from the field, but died of his wounds at Elvas on 10 June.)

For a week Heinrich Heine marched with the force pursuing the French. Ever hungry, he recorded that the Poles in his battalion ate raw horseflesh, but although he could not bring himself to do the same he enjoyed a meal of fried donkey! Retracing their steps they passed by the field of Albuera, assailed from afar by the stink of decomposition and funeral pyres.

The siege of Badajoz was continued, involving engineers and artillery of the KGL, but was given up once more at the approach of Soult with fresh forces. The Allies and French spent a weary summer marching and countermarching, seeking advantages that never materialised.

At about this time the 7th Line Battalion was 'reduced', having suffered so many casualties that it was no longer effective. The surviving rank-and-file were distributed amongst other KGL units and the officers and NCOs were sent back to England to recruit and train a new 7th Battalion. Three troops of the 2nd Hussars arrived from England. The detachments of the Light Battalions rejoined their units after an absence of two years, to be brigaded with the Brunswick-Oels Jägers in the 7th Division – the system of 'Divisions' now being well and truly established. The three remaining Line battalions continued to serve with the 1st Division.

In September 1811 occurred the action at El Bodon, where a strong force of 2,000 French cavalry fell upon a covering force of the 3rd Division consisting of five weak squadrons (about 340 men of the KGL 1st Hussars, and the British 11th Hussars, a British battalion and two battalions of Portuguese artillery). In a running fight over six miles of ground the Allied cavalry made repeated charges to cover the withdrawal, inflicting nearly 1,000 casualties on the enemy. Wellington subsequently issued a general order to his army calling attention to El Bodon as 'a memorable example of what can be effected by steadiness, discipline and confidence.' In the face of such determination Marmont withdrew, allowing Wellington to lay siege to Ciudad Rodrigo once again.

To the south, in late October 1811, the KGL 2nd Hussars took part in the action at Arroyo dos Molinos, where a British force under Sir Roland Hill made a deep raid into enemy territory in wretched winter weather, and surprised Gen Girard's French force of 2,500 infantry and 400 cavalry as they were forming up to march. The French fled in panic, hotly pursued by the British who killed, wounded or captured two generals, three

BELOW **Rear view of the 4th Line Bn sergeant's jacket. It has plain white lace, and there are seven 'darts' of this on the scarlet wings instead of the usual six. Note the 'light infantry' pockets instead of those ordered for grenadiers; and the skirt turnback ornaments, shown in detail on Plate H. (Author's drawing)**

ABOVE **The coat of an officer of one of the centre companies of the 1st Line Battalion, KGL, reconstructed from photographs of an item in the Bowmann Museum, Celle. The gorget, lace, buttons and belt plate are all gilt. (Author's drawing)**

colonels, 1,800 others and three guns for the loss of 70 British casualties.

1812: Ciudad Rodrigo & Badajoz

During the winter of 1811/1812 Wellington had assembled the siege train and stores necessary for the reduction of Ciudad Rodrigo, one of the vital 'gates' on the Portuguese-Spanish frontier. On 8 January 1812 his troops once again attacked the place, and on the 19th they successfully stormed it, though at the cost of over 1,200 men. Taking part were the 1st, 2nd, and 5th Line Battalions and a foot battery of the Legion. Their losses of 82 men were light, as they were not involved in the final assault. Some 300 of the enemy were killed or wounded, 1,500 made prisoner, and over 150 pieces of artillery were taken.

Wellington now turned his attention on the second important frontier fortress of Badajoz. He had assembled another siege train at Elvas, and on 16 March he invested the walled city. Apart from engineer and artillery officers no KGL units were involved in this operation, which was brought to a conclusion on 6 April when Badajoz was successfully stormed. The bloody fighting in the breaches cost an appalling number of Allied casualties; when they broke into the town the battle-crazed British and Portuguese stormers went on a drunken orgy of pillage, rape and murder in one of the most shameful episodes in British military history. Wellington's provost marshals eventually restored order, but not until they had hanged men as an example to the rest. The Allies had lost over 5,000 men; they took the same number of prisoners, in addition to those of the enemy they killed.

The fall of Badajoz added to the problems faced by the French marshals in Spain. They had lost 30,000 of their best troops, stripped away for Napoleon's campaign in Russia. The siege of Cadiz continued to engage 50,000 men; British and Neapolitan troops from Sicily (including detachments from the KGL) had landed in eastern Spain to draw French forces away from Wellington; and a British naval squadron had landed marines in north-eastern Spain to the same purpose. All over Spain the forces of the Juntas – regular and irregular – continued to harass garrisons and communications at every opportunity, chronically dispersing the French effort.

At this time the 1st and 2nd Dragoons of the KGL joined the army from Ireland, forming a cavalry brigade under the command of MajGen von Bock; and in May 1812 MajGen von Alten was appointed to command the famous Light Division.

Salamanca

Now master of the border fortresses at last, Wellington was finally ready to advance into Spain. Leaving a corps to guard against the French forces

ABOVE **Rear view of the officer's coat, 1st Line Bn, KGL; the ornaments securing the white turnbacks are illustrated in detail on Plate H. (Author's drawing)**

in the south, he set off in June at the head of an Allied army of over 50,000 men to seek battle with Marshal Marmont's Army of Portugal at Salamanca. Probing ahead with the cavalry were Von Bock's dragoons and the 1st Hussars, frequently clashing with French cavalry as the Allies drove in the defences before Salamanca to occupy the city in late June. It was the first Spanish city to be liberated from the French, and there was much jubilation.

For many days the armies of Wellington and Marmont marched and countermarched to the north and east of Salamanca, as each commander sought an advantage over the other. The critical moment came on 22 July near the village of Los Arapiles, when Marmont, attempting to outflank Wellington, opened two gaps in his front into which the Allies attacked. After a furious battle the Allies drove the French from the field in defeat. French losses have been estimated as high as 13,000 men; certainly 7,000 French prisoners were taken, along with 11 guns, two Eagles and six other standards. Allied losses were over 5,000. King's German Legion units present at Salamanca were the 1st and 2nd Dragoons, 1st Hussars, 1st and 2nd Light Battalions, 1st, 2nd and 5th Line Battalions, and Sympher's Battery of foot artillery. Their losses were 127 killed and wounded; amongst the Allied casualties was Gen von Alten, wounded in the thigh by a carbine ball.

Heinrich Heine of the 2nd Light Battalion spent the battle either skirmishing with French light infantry, or fighting in line next to the Brunswickers in his brigade. He graphically described one experience under fire: 'Suddenly a cannonball took away the Brunswicker next to me, and also the man behind him, who lay there with an open body, stood up, stuffed his bowels back into his belly, fell down, and died.'

The 1st Hussars took part in a charge which steadied the 5th Division at a critical point in the battle; Sympher's Battery distinguished itself; and to the skirmishers of the KGL Line battalions went the distinction of spearheading the attack that took the Grande Arapile, a commanding height held by the French for most of the battle. At the close of the battle the Line battalions fought to drive in the right of the French line, the last part of Marmont's army still resisting.

Garcia Hernandez

Next morning the pursuit was taken up by the KGL Dragoons led by Von Bock, and accompanied by the 2nd Light Battalion. Heinrich Heine described the day:

'The next morning, after rations were issued, we formed up next to our cavalry. We were inspected by Wellington, whereupon our troopers pushed forward over a narrow bridge in pursuit of the enemy.

We followed and came to a field where we found two Grenadier squares hit by our Dragoons. Amongst them lay many of our troopers, together with their horses. We ran towards a hill where a third square was about to be attacked by our Dragoons. The first horse fell on to the bayonets, three or four others dashed into the square, confusion reigned, our cavalry attacked from all sides, and a few minutes later the whole battalion was cut down. Those who threw away their arms and ran away were rounded up by our troopers. We marched across the field of dead bodies and saw one cut in two – such power had our Dragoons when they swung their long broadswords. After a fourth square had been dealt with by our cavalry, and captured, the French cavalry galloped off, and we arrived, without firing a shot, on top of the hill. We followed the enemy until evening. Sometimes the enemy stood, but when our fearsome Dragoons charged them, they fled.'

Thus did a simple soldier remember the action at Garcia Hernandez, where the 1st and 2nd Dragoons of the KGL earned the admiration of the Allied armies by charging and breaking three enemy infantry squares

(those of the French 6th, 69th and 76th Line Regiments,) and capturing 1,400 prisoners at a cost of 127 men. Wellington was prompted to record, 'I have never witnessed a more gallant charge than was made upon the enemy's infantry by the heavy brigade of the King's German Legion under Major-General von Bock.' He appointed a guard of honour from the brigade to attend him. Shortly afterwards the War Office issued the following notification:

'In consideration of the King's German Legion having so frequently distinguished themselves against the enemy, and particularly upon the occasion of the late victory obtained near Salamanca, His Royal Highness the Prince Regent is pleased, in the name of and on the behalf of His Majesty, to command that the officers who are now serving with temporary rank in the several regiments of that corps, shall have permanent rank in the British army from the date of their respective commissions.'

Wellington now marched on Madrid, which he entered in triumph on 12 August 1812, with the Dragoons of the KGL in the place of honour at the head of the column.

'The Battle of Garcia Hernandez' by Adolph Northen - the charge of the 1st Dragoons, KGL, on 23 July 1812. The painting shows the moment when a wounded horse and rider fell into the French infantry square to cause the breach into which the others rode. The conventional wisdom of the period was that it was impossible for cavalry alone to break a steady infantry square which had not first been weakened and shaken by artillery or close-range musketry; the exploit of Von Bock's dragoons became famous throughout Wellington's army. (Courtesy Niedersächsische Landesgalerie, Hannover)

Epilogue

The story of the King's German Legion will be concluded in a second title (MAA 339); but before ending this first half of the story mention should be made of the continuing undercover operation conducted by Col von der Decken to obtain recruits from enemy-occupied Hanover.

Operating from Heligoland, he sent agents into north Germany and Denmark to set up an escape route which proved the equal of any established in the Second World War to bring home Allied airmen. One such agent (Friedrich) told how he was landed on the coast near Cuxhaven in the guise of a Danish sailor who had escaped from a British man-of-war and wished to return home. His cover story got him through numerous checks by French officials and police until he arrived in Hamburg, where he identified himself to his contacts by means of a letter written on his pocket handkerchief in 'invisible ink'. This means was also used to report to Von der Decken, via letters sent from Husum in Denmark to Heligoland. In these Friedrich asked for a forger and a linguist to be sent to assist him. These eventually arrived in the form of two sergeants of the 60th Regiment: Batcherini – an Italian – was the forger, while the other NCO had served in many armies before joining the British and spoke several languages. (Not all Von der Decken's agents were as careful as Friedrich, who witnessed two others shot to death by the French.)

Changing his identity from that of a sailor to a 'gentleman', Friedrich enjoyed a high lifestyle as he went about obtaining recruits for the Legion. Within a few days he had enlisted six and had them spirited off to Heligoland by fishermen in his pay. With Batcherini to forge his documents, Friedrich then became Mr Holtengrin, a Danish civil servant, and moved to Hanover to pursue further recruits. His story makes fascinating reading.

UNIFORMS

Many fine examples of the uniforms and insignia of the KGL exist in museums in Germany. However, they are nearly all from the later period of the Legion's existence. Less is known of the uniforms of earlier times.

The confusion surrounding the raising of the King's Germans resulted in the first recruits being clothed in rifle green. In this they followed the practice of other German units employed by Britain, including Hompesch's Light Infantry, Hardy's Royal York Fusiliers, Ramsay's York Rangers and the rifle battalions of the 60th Foot. Major von der Decken, the officer authorised in July 1803 to raise the King's German Regiment, was at that time an officer in the 60th.

After the two Light battalions had been raised the remainder of the infantry of the KGL were uniformed in the manner of the British Royal Regiments of the line, who mostly had Royal blue facings, a Royal blue stripe in the lace of the junior ranks, and a crown on buttons and 'breastplates' (shoulder belt plates). Certain uniform distinctions were copied from the regiments of Foot Guards, as surviving KGL uniforms demonstrate.

Since the units were formed in the south of England the uniforms of the KGL would have been supplied by London clothing contractors, who

were subject to the scrutiny of the officers of the Army Clothing Board. Although no 'sealed pattern' examples of these early uniforms exist it is safe to assume that they conformed closely to the regulations of the time, and that the infantry and cavalry of the KGL were clothed exactly as their British counterparts.

The same cannot be surmised for the King's German Artillery, who did not come under the control of the body regulating British artillery units – the Board of Ordnance – until 1806. The KGA *may* have worn similar uniforms to those of the Royal Artillery in the years 1803 to 1806, but there is little evidence to substantiate this. Once under the control of the Board of Ordnance they certainly dressed as British artillerymen, badges excepted.

From their formation the King's German Dragoons wore a similar uniform to that of the British dragoon regiments. Not all of their equipment was new. The 15th Light Dragoons passed over 745 sets of saddlery to the 2nd KGD on their formation in 1805, including '300 sets at £5 [and] 445 sets at £1.10s.0d', indicating that most were well-used. The value of this saddlery was credited to the colonel of the 15th – a reminder of the way in which regiments were run like businesses in those days.

The King's German Light Dragoons began life in the Tarleton helmets and dolman jackets worn by British light dragoons, but fairly soon took unto themselves the costume of hussars – very fashionable in the early 1800s. It is recorded that the 3rd King's German Light Dragoons styled and dressed themselves as 'Hussars' from their formation.

In the period covered by this title the only KGL unit insignia was that borne on uniform buttons, and painted on equipment, the title or initials of the Legion being worn on shako and helmet plates, buckles and belt plates.

In British service military rank was indicated in a variety of ways, some long-established and others recently introduced. In the infantry officers could be immediately identified by the superior quality and cut of their uniforms, the scarlet of their coats contrasting starkly with the brick-red 'Stroud-water scarlet' of the jackets of private soldiers and junior non-commissioned officers. The lace decorating the coats, hats, and sometimes the netherwear of officers of the KGL was of gold braid, which again contrasted with the white worsted braid of the junior ranks. Fastened to their collars officers wore a gorget, indicating the holder of a commission, on which was engraved the Royal coat of arms and the title of the wearer's regiment. All officers were armed with swords. About their waists officers wore a sash of crimson silk, whilst on their shoulders were epaulettes indicating the grade of their rank. These were in gold for the officers of the KGL; junior officers wore epaulettes

Mirleton cap of an officer of the 2nd Light Battalion, KGL; known in Germany as a *Flugelmütze*, the cap was part of the costume of the Continental hussar. The 'wing' could be worn wrapped around and fastened or, as here, allowed to fall away to expose a white interior; the peak could also be worn either up or down. The cap cords were gold. (Author's drawing)

Shoulder belt plates - 'breast-plates' - of the KGL. ABOVE **a gilded example of an officer's plate with the lion, garter and crown in relief.**

on the right shoulder, and field officers on both, as did adjutants and officers of Grenadier companies and Light Infantry. Epaulettes varied in construction according to rank and employment.

Sergeants also wore jackets of a superior quality to junior ranks, of scarlet cloth and laced with plain white braid. Sergeants' sashes were of worsted, and in the case of the KGL carried a central stripe of Royal blue. As most of the sergeants in a British infantry battalion carried 7-foot pikes (often still called by the archaic term 'halberds'), these weapons became a mark of their rank as much as the swords they carried.

In 1802 a new system of badges of rank for non-commissioned officers was introduced based on a system of chevrons. These were made of regimental lace and worn on the right upper arm. Sergeant-majors and quartermaster-sergeants wore four chevrons; sergeants, three; corporals, two, and lance-corporals, 'chosen men' or bombardiers, one. In time it became practice for the NCOs of Grenadier companies and Light Infantry to wear chevrons on both sleeves. Sergeant-majors in the KGL wore chevrons made of officers' lace.

Ranks below sergeant were immediately identified by the colour of their jackets – hardly 'redcoats', more brownish or brick-red. Their lace was of white worsted, often with stripes or 'worms' of colour. They wore no sashes or swords, but the men of the Grenadier and Light companies were identified by 'wings', which in the KGL copied the pattern of regiments such as the Guards and 2nd Foot.

Following British practice, officers of the KGL Light battalions wore no indicators of rank in the field other than sashes and swords. Their NCOs wore the usual chevrons. Light infantry officers and sergeants could be marked by the whistles they carried to signal their men in action.

The King's German Dragoons broadly followed the rules governing infantry regarding badges and indicators of rank, as did the King's German Artillery. The Light Dragoons/Hussars, however, only followed the rules in that their NCOs wore chevrons. Officers of British light cavalry were obvious by the richness of their uniform, the magnificence of their saddlery and horse furniture, and the breeding of their mounts. They wore no other marks of rank, feeling, perhaps, that none were necessary.

From 1803 until 1808 the British Army insisted that its officers and men grew their hair long at the back, formed into an 11-inch queue or pigtail at the nape of the neck. This was tightly bound in black ribbon and decorated with a black leather 'rose'. In 1804 the queue was ordered to be shortened to seven inches. Grenadiers, Light infantry and drummers had their back hair plaited and turned up under the cap with a comb; ribbons or leather representations of ribbons hung down on the collar from the plait. In 1808 all hair was ordered to be cut short, an order that some regiments chose to ignore, including the King's German Dragoons.

The fatigue or undress uniform of the time consisted of a sleeved waistcoat, overall trousers and a soft cap. In inclement weather the waistcoat could be worn under the soldier's red coat and the overalls over his breeches and gaiters. His cap, referred to as a 'night cap' as it was worn from Retreat to Reveille, was usually carried inside his shako, forming a convenient bag for pipe, tobacco and tinder.

On campaign overalls were worn by all arms. These were made of coarse woollen material to a sort of 'one-size-fits-all' pattern which would be adjusted to the figure of the wearer by cutting off the bottoms of the legs and altering the positions of the buttons on the outside seam. Later, light drill 'nankeen' trousers were issued.

Many participants described how tattered and worn uniforms became in the field, particularly in the hard campaigning of the Peninsula, where footwear or clothing were often taken from the dead or from prisoners. In composing the colour plates for this title the author/artist has chosen not to depict the 'fantasy' outfits that may have been worn, but to concentrate on the appearance of men of the KGL properly turned out. How these uniforms may have faded, frayed and worn he leaves to the reader's imagination.

ABOVE **a rank-and-file plate, the standard issue item with the design cut into the surface of the brass. (Author's drawing)**

Weapons and Equipment

The men of the KGL were mostly armed and equipped from British arsenals and agents. However, the employment of their arms was in some cases at odds with British practice – mainly in the use of the rifle. Whereas the British chose to arm complete units with the rifle, which they then split up into detachments in the field, the KGL chose to have a detachment of riflemen – 'sharpshooters' – within each battalion. The remainder were armed with the India Pattern musket.

Howard Blackmore, in his *British Military Firearms 1650-1850*, indicates that the 1st and 2nd Light Battalions of the KGL were not issued with rifles until 1806. (Many of these must have been lost in 1807 when the transport *Northumberland*, carrying men of the 2nd Light Battalion to Sweden, was wrecked with the loss of all arms and baggage.) Blackmore further records that in 1807 the 8th KGL complained that their rifles were of three differing calibres, an observation which suggests that their rifles were of the various Continental types which Britain had been buying from gunmakers in the German states or had copied by British gunsmiths. For example, an order for 5,000 'Prussian rifled muskets' was placed by the Board of Ordnance in 1798, to arm the many foreign units coming into British service. Eventually a British-designed rifle, the Baker, was accepted for service, and manufacture began in late 1800; but it was to be a long time before these British rifles became available in large numbers. In the period covered by this title it is safe to assume that the sharpshooters of the KGL were armed with a variety of rifles of German manufacture – weapons with which they would have been familiar.

King's German Legion cavalry weapons included pistols, carbines, bayonets and swords. By far the most important were the latter, which were the 1796 pattern heavy cavalry sword, a straight, heavy weapon with a 35-inch blade; and the 1796 pattern light cavalry sabre, a curved slashing weapon with a 33-inch blade. Neither was an ideal sword, both

being copies of foreign weapons; however, there is ample evidence that the cavalry of the KGL worked at the sword exercise until a high degree of skill was achieved. The following extract from the history of the Gordon Highlanders makes the point.

July 1812, Spain: 'At Villa Alba the Highlanders admired the conduct, and regretted the fate of a hussar of the King's German Legion, who, on being attacked by a powerful French dragoon, after a deal of dexterous sword-play, killed him just as a second arrived to his assistance. To it they went, cut and thrust, till a third dragoon ran his sword through the gallant German, at the same moment that the point of the latter pierced his second antagonist.' Again, at Venta del Pozo Sergeant-Major Kielpennig of the 1st KGD, wounded and surrounded by French Lancers, hacked his way out of their encirclement by sheer skill with the sword.

A detailed description of the equipment worn by the infantry of the KGL is best sought in the author's Osprey title MAA 107, *British Infantry Equipments (1) 1808-1908 (Revised Edition)*; but the practice of painting knapsacks in the facing colour – black for the Light and blue for the Line battalions – should be mentioned. It predated the order to paint all knapsacks black, an order which the Line battalions chose to ignore. Another practice apparently unique to the KGL was that of painting company designations on the sides of knapsacks.

It is impossible to be precise about the equipment of the cavalry of the Legion. Mention has already been made of the 2nd KGD being issued with second-hand saddlery on their formation, probably because the 15th Light Dragoons were re-equipping with the recently introduced 'light cavalry universal saddle, pattern 1805'. The formation of the light dragoons/hussars of the KGL spanned the period which saw the approval of this saddle. It would seem obvious therefore that the 1st Light Dragoons would not have received it, and that the 3rd Hussars did, but this is supposition.

The haversack of an officer of the King's German Legion - see Plate C3; it was made of black material and usually water-proofed with oil or varnish. The lion, crown and cypher were painted in gold, red and white. (Author's drawing)

THE PLATES

A: LIGHT CAVALRY, 1805-1808

A1: Private, 2nd King's German Light Dragoons, 1805

His uniform conforms to that prescribed by British regulations for their regiments of light dragoons and comprises a 'Tarleton' helmet, a dolman or short jacket, leather breeches and Hessian boots. His equipment consists of a waist belt to support his 1796 pattern sabre and the short bayonet for his 1796 pattern carbine, and a pouch belt to carry his carbine ammunition pouch and swivel hook. All the German light dragoon regiments wore moustaches, whilst the regulations of the time called for the hair to be dressed into a 7-inch queue or pigtail into which a leather rosette was pinned. The brasswork on the helmet gave additional protection to the skull, as did the bearskin crest. Regimental identity was marked by the title scroll on the helmet, and the white collar and cuffs of the dolman. The white-over-red headdress plume was worn by most British troops as a field recognition sign.

A2: Private, 3rd King's German Light Dragoons (Hussars); Spain, 1808

The 3rd are recorded as having dressed and styled themselves as 'Hussars' from their formation, adopting the fur cap and pelisse of the Continental hussar. (The pelisse could be worn over the dolman in cold weather, as illustrated.) Dressed for campaigning, our subject has equipment including haversack and canteen, grain for his horse, and a cloak strapped across the pistol holsters in front of his saddle. Behind his saddle is a valise and 'waterdeck'. By this time the sabretasche, a large black leather pouch, had been added to the equipment of the British cavalryman. Note our subject's queue, moustaches and the braids on each cheek - another mark of the Continental hussar.

B: LINE INFANTRY, 1805

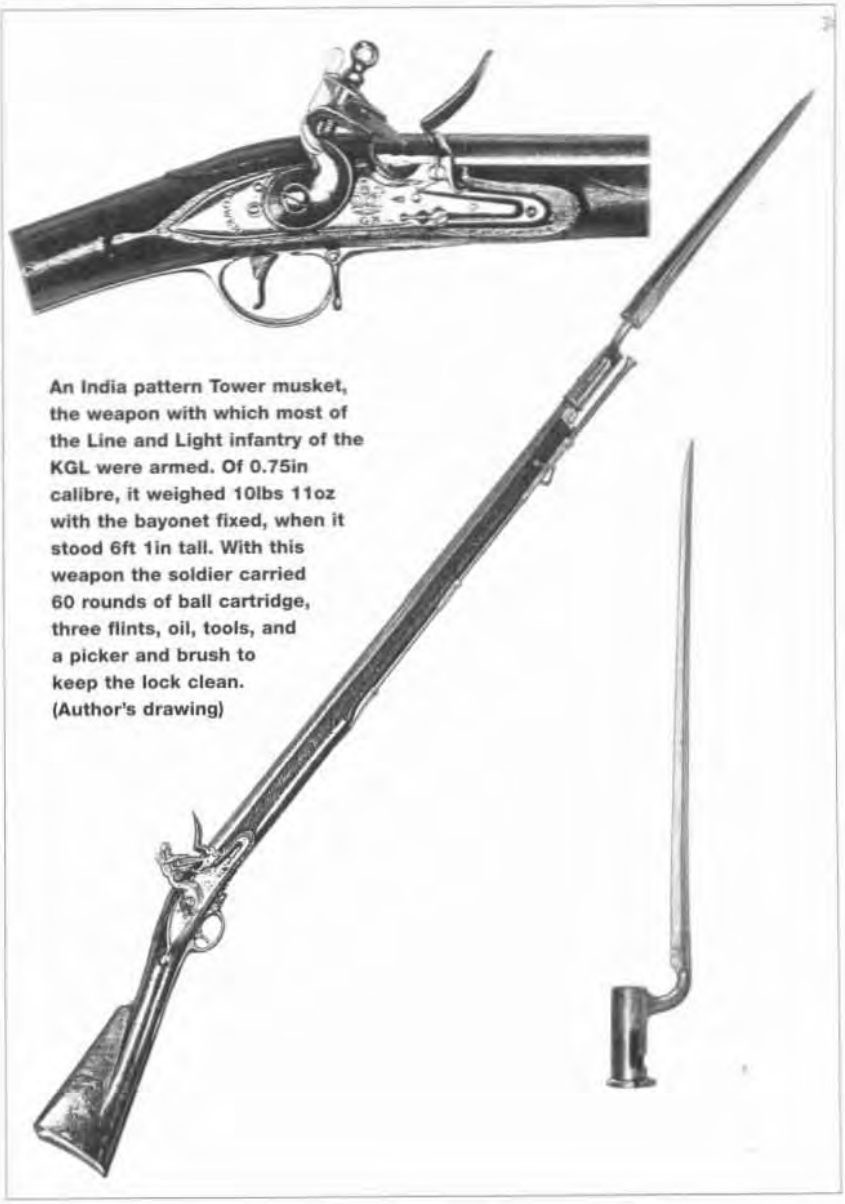
Forming in the south of England, the Line infantry of the KGL presented a uniform appearance broken only by the battalion distinctions on buttons, colours and drums. Their uniforms conformed with the regulations in force for Royal regiments, and as shako plates for the KGL were not designed until 1804 they wore the universal pattern plate until the KGL pattern became available.

B1: Sergeant, drill order

Note his scarlet jacket, plain white lace, sword, sash, gloves and cane. The black stock at his throat is lined with white, and he wears a ruffle or 'breast' below it. At this time chevrons were backed with strips of facing colour.

B2: Recruit, drill order

The recruit being 'instructed' wears the junior ranks' version of drill order consisting of the sleeved waistcoat with facing colour at collar and cuffs, breeches and stockings. He wears a bayonet belt and carries an India pattern musket. He is attempting the 'goose-step', by means of which the British infantryman was taught to march in the slow and ponderous manner of the time.



An India pattern Tower musket, the weapon with which most of the Line and Light infantry of the KGL were armed. Of 0.75in calibre, it weighed 10lbs 11oz with the bayonet fixed, when it stood 6ft 1in tall. With this weapon the soldier carried 60 rounds of ball cartridge, three flints, oil, tools, and a picker and brush to keep the lock clean. (Author's drawing)

B3: Captain, full dress
Note the black bicorne hat with black cockade, gold loop and 'pulls', and white-over-red cut feather plume; the bright scarlet cloth of his long-tailed coat; his gorget, epaulette, sash, gloves, cane and Hessian boots.

B4: Drummer, full dress
The drummer beating time for the drill has a bearskin cap with a plate bearing the Royal arms, trophies of arms and drums. His coat is exactly to the regulation of the time, which called for Royal blue wings and blue-and-white lace for drummers of Royal regiments. Note his drum apron, short sword and gloves. Side drums of the time were large, being 18ins in diameter and 18ins deep. They were painted and embellished as shown.

C: LINE INFANTRY, 1811
By this time many of the units of the KGL were committed to the campaign in the Peninsula; this plate depicts the appearance of the men of the Line battalions in that theatre.

C1: Sergeant of a Grenadier Company, guard-mounting order
His jacket is based on a surviving example; note the chevrons, and the red-and-blue turnback ornament. The varnished 1800 pattern shako had by now been replaced by a version made of felt, on which were worn the plate, cockade and plume of the former pattern. In the case of Grenadier companies the plume was all white. Overalls were the campaign netherwear. Our subject carries a rolled greatcoat strapped to his sword belt, and a 7-foot pike; note also his sash. Hair was now worn cut short to the neck.

C2: Corporal, Grenadier Company, 2nd Line Battalion
He is in full marching order which includes the recently-introduced 'Trotter'-pattern frame knapsack. This is painted in the facing colour of dark blue, and bears the corporal's company equipment set number 'A7' on the side, repeated on his canteen. Note his KGL shako plate, Grenadier cap plume and grenade rosette badge; Grenadier wings, and chevrons - these were worn on both sleeves in the battalion's two flank companies. His weapon is an India pattern musket, and he carries a haversack, canteen and rolled greatcoat. Attached to his 'breastplate' is a strap and chains which secure the picker and brush to clean the lock of his musket.

C3: Junior officer, battalion colour party
He is illustrated with a cased regimental colour drawn to correct scale. The battalion's two colours were much larger than shown by artists of the time, being 6ft x 6ft 6ins on a staff that was nearly ten feet in length. Until going into action colours were usually protected as shown by an oilcloth sleeve with a brass tip. His coat is based on an existing example. Note our subject's oilskin-covered hat and plume, sash, trousers, and haversack, and also the turnback badges on the tails of his coat.

D: LIGHT INFANTRY
A move to 'Fix one general uniform for Rifle Corps, permitting no other variation than ... buttons and facing' was being discussed before the formation of the King's German Regiment. The fact that they were clothed in rifle green is a strong indication that the regiment's intended role was that of a rifle unit, whilst the black facings chosen followed the example of the only British rifle unit then in existence, Manningham's Rifle Corps (eventually the Rifle Brigade).

D1: Corporal, King's German Regiment, 1803
His shako and breastplate bear the device of a crowned bugle horn, the appointed badge for rifle units, recorded as still being worn in the KGL in 1812. The cut of his jacket accords to the regulations of the time, as do his pantaloons and short gaiters. He is armed with an India pattern musket and bayonet, and carries a 32-round pouch, canvas knapsack and rolled greatcoat. Note his cap cords, plume and rosette.

D2: Private, 2nd Light Battalion, KGL, 1809
By 1809 trousers and a peakless cap were recorded as being worn by men of the 2nd Light Battalion. Here, our subject carries the new 'Trotter' frame-knapsack upon which his unit's title is painted. He also carries a 60-round pouch, rolled greatcoat and India pattern musket.

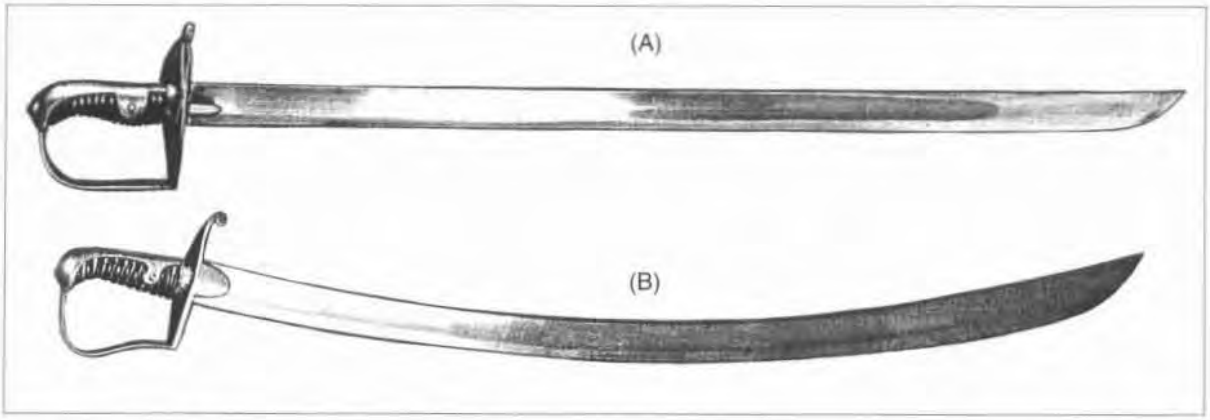
D3: Officer, 1812
The details of his uniform are taken from a contemporary painting, from which there is little to determine his unit. Note the continued wearing of the crowned bugle horn on his shako, the whistle on his pouch belt, the profusion of metallic lace on his pantaloons and Hessian boots, and his gold cap cords.

E: LIGHT INFANTRY, SPAIN, 1811
E1: Sergeant-bugler, 2nd Light Battalion
He wears his uniform jacket with 'night cap' and 'nankeen' trousers. The red collar and cuffs were the mark of a bugler, as were the padded red-and-green wings. Note his badge of rank, light infantry sash, belt and sword-bayonet.

E2: 'Sharpshooter', 1st Light Battalion
He wears a newly-introduced pattern of shako peculiar to the light infantry, which had leather reinforcing on the crown and band – see page 33. His equipment includes a 60-round pouch, powder horn and sword belt. To his front, and not visible, are a priming flask and 'ball-bag'. He is armed with a rifle of German manufacture and an 18in *Hirschfänger* sword-bayonet.

Around the campfire in the background are a soldier of one of the Light battalions and a comrade from the 5th Line Battalion. They wear 'night caps' - note the fancy decoration of the latter - and waistcoats as they apply themselves to the task of cooking their rations. The tents are of the 'bell' pattern made by the firm of John Trotter, supplier of most of the British Army's equipment at this time.

E3: 'Sharpshooter' of a Line battalion
He too is armed with a German rifle and sword-bayonet, and his equipment is to the same design as that of E2, but in whitened buff leather. Note the green plume in his shako, the light infantry bugle horn badge on his cockade, his KGL shako plate, and his light infantry shoulder wings. The chains suspended from his coatee button are those for his picker and brush.



The 1796 patterns of heavy cavalry sword (A) and light cavalry sabre (B), which wrought so much destruction in the hands of the cavalrymen of the King's German Legion. (Author's drawing)

F: 2ND KING'S GERMAN DRAGOONS, 1812

F1: Private, marching order

This soldier and his mount are depicted at the time of the regiment's astonishing victory over the French squares at Garcia Hernandez.

He has his rolled cloak strapped above his pistol holsters, the valise and cornsacks behind the saddle, the carbine tucked into his pouch belt, and the haversack and canteen slung on his back - all gave a certain amount of protection in a mêlée of horsemen or infantry. But the greatest protection came from the sword, as it parried cuts and points. Often criticised, the heavy, straight blade and disc hilt of the 1796 pattern heavy cavalry sword made it an ideal parrying weapon.

F2: Corporal, marching order

This NCO demonstrates the metal 'skull' worn inside the dragoons' hats when in action; combined with chinscales, they gave a great deal of protection to the head. Our subject wears the jacket and overalls of the time and shows the method of wearing the carbine belt, waist belt, sabretasche, haversack and canteen. Regimental insignia was worn on buttons and on the plate of the waist belt. Note his sword and the bayonet for his carbine.

G: KING'S GERMAN ARTILLERY, 1807

This plate depicts a 9-pounder gun and crew of a foot battery of the KGA at the time of the British expedition to Denmark. Except for insignia they are clothed and equipped as their Royal Artillery counterparts.

G1: Bombardier, marching order

We show him minus the 'field equipment' of haversack and canteen, for clarity of the other details. His shako has a plate similar to that of the RA but with 'King's German Legion' on the garter. These plates were smaller than the infantry model, and of a different shape. Our subject is armed with a 'hanger' shortsword, and carries a pouch belt with all the tools and equipment for cleaning his gun's touch-hole and preparing the loaded gun for firing. Note his knapsack and rolled greatcoat, his queued hair, and his single-chevron badge of rank. Beside him is a linstock with a slow-burning match cord, from which the portfire next to it could be ignited to fire the gun.

To the rear other crew members stand at ease around their gun. Painted on the flaps of their knapsacks is the KGA badge.

G2: Officer

He wears the rather plain uniform of an officer of the British artillery, the only KGA distinctions being borne on buttons and sword belt plate.

H: GUIDON AND INSIGNIA

H1: Cavalry guidon of the 4th Squadron, 1st King's German Dragoons. The ground was in the facing colour of the regiment, Royal blue. It was carried on a lance 9 ft long, to which it was secured by cords, and measured 2ft 3ins in height by 3ft 5ins in length. The lance was secured to the bearer by means of a carbine clip and belt.

H2: Shako plate, KGL Line battalions, 1805-13. Taken from a design traced from Hawkes' metal badge book and dated 1804, it is unlikely to have come into service until late 1805 or early 1806.

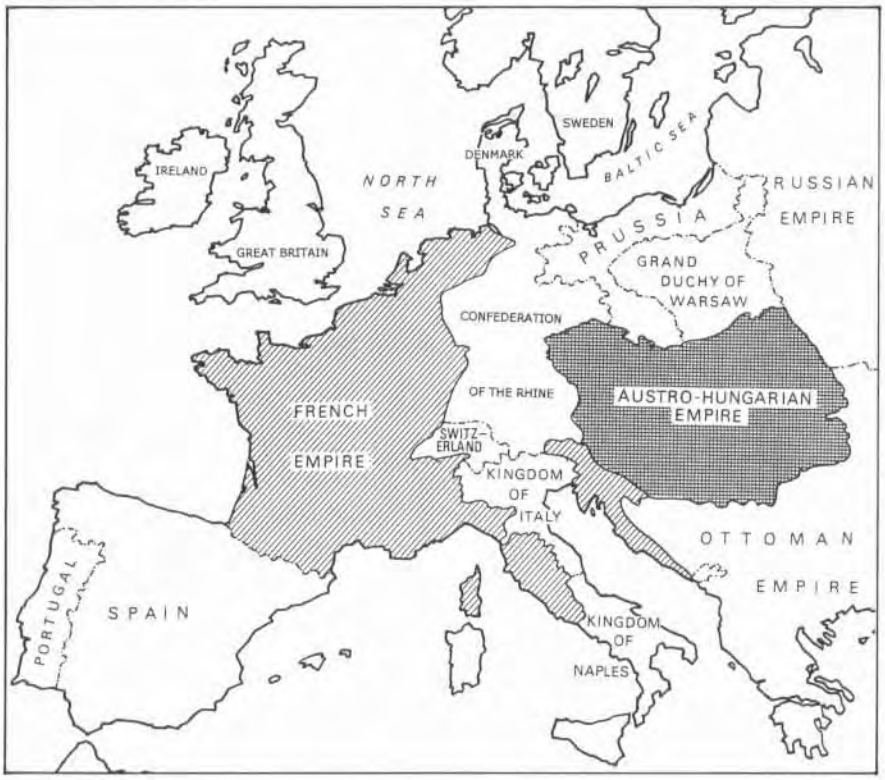
H3: Officer's turnback badge, worn throughout the Line battalions on the tails of coats and jackets.

H4: Valise designation, King's German Horse Artillery.

H5: Other ranks' turnback badge, Grenadier companies. Light infantry wore bugle horn badges on their turnbacks; centre or battalion companies wore no turnback device.

H6: Buttons. Officers' buttons were gilt and those of other ranks pewter. A great variety of button designs were worn throughout the KGL, but Line infantry battalions wore those shown: a crown, over K.G.L., over the battalion number.

H7: Grenadiers' wing. The somewhat odd look of this item is due to the fact that the strap was worn behind the shoulder, while the wing was put on the sleeve evenly. This is therefore a left-hand wing. Several regiments wore wings as shown, with both the shoulder strap 'tuft' and the wing fringe, but only those of the KGL survive on preserved coats.



Western Europe in 1812. The vastly expanded French Empire is shown in diagonal shading; but it must be remembered that Napoleon had also placed members of his family on the thrones of Spain, Italy, Naples and Westphalia – part of the Confederation of the Rhine. Denmark/Norway and the Grand Duchy of Warsaw were French-dependent states, and Prussia, Austria and Sweden were neutralised – the latter under the rule of Napoleon's former marshal, Bernadotte, as King Charles XIV John.

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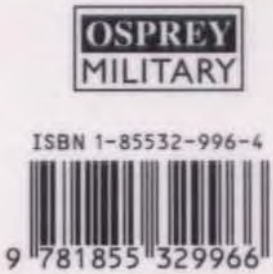
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